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MARK EYLMER'S REVENGE.

—:

VOL. III.



# MARK EYLMER'S REVENGE.

BY

MRS. J. K. SPENDER,

AUTHOR OF

“JOCELYN’S MISTAKE,” “PARTED LIVES,”

“HER OWN FAULT.”

&c. &c.

“How would you be  
If He, which is the top of judgment, should  
But judge you as you are? O think on that;  
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,  
Like man new made.”

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:  
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,  
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1877.

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251. d. 571.





## MARK EYLMER'S REVENGE.

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### Book III. (*Continued.*)

#### CHAPTER III.

THE Circean cup of prosperity which Rosette had begun to drain, with its numbing indifference to the sorrow she had brought on others, received its full aroma in the Paris season.

Not that she produced the effect which Paul de Lafarges had expected. When all opinions had been taken about her, he was compelled to confess that his pretty English wife had made but an indifferent success. Women criticised her through their opera-glasses, admired her hair and

eyes, made due allowance for her good figure, and then condemned her English manners. And Rosette took no pains to fall into their ways. The fabricated rules and manners of Parisian society were utterly strange to her, and she preferred to follow her own impulses, and amuse herself in her own way. She had been chaffed from girlhood about her conquests, and liked to make conquests still in an innocent way, not knowing that the half-coquetry, without definite meaning, which in England and America is called "flirtation," is not understood in France.

This meaningless sort of coquetry came naturally to the girl, just as it came natural to her to be in a state of earthly felicity about her dress, and to carry every fashion to an extreme, which would have revolted some of the more fastidious Parisians who were remarkable for their good taste. After the season commenced, she and Paul saw less and less of each other. He con-

finer himself more to the society of his few familiars, making longer absences from home, and looking anxious when he returned. She once tried to question him about these absences, but he was as impenetrable as a mask, keeping curiosity at a distance—even when she tried to laugh at him for being mysterious, all her tiny arrows glanced off from him, as if he wore chain armour.

If a few clouds began to gather round his speculative horizon, Rosette's numerous acquaintances troubled themselves little about it. De Lafarges was a master of some exceedingly good horses. He had even been known to run horses at the Grand Prix, and though the gossips of Paris knew that he speculated and gambled, and that the men who had frequented his suppers in past times had the reputation of serpents rather than doves, yet Paris at this period held such things very lightly. So long as a man entertained, and so long as his wife was ready

to launch into that giddy world which ate, drank, danced, and played through the big and small hours, Paris did not trouble itself to make inquiries.

Meanwhile, Paul gave Rosette, at first if anything, too much liberty. She always thought herself sure beforehand of his approbation and his consent. She fancied that it would be impossible for her to displease him in anything. He had neither questions to ask, nor wishes to enforce. There had been occasions when she would have liked him to express an opinion about the new fashions which she wore; but he had lately seemed to be so engrossed in his own affairs that even when she had consulted him about a headdress, he had answered,

“Do as you like. Women know best about that sort of thing.”

But then came a time when he suddenly enforced his commands, telling her that he wished her to deny herself to certain visitors.

“How funny of him!” she said. “He likes to be talked about himself, and I should have thought he would have liked his wife to be out of the ordinary hum-drum groove, and to attract a little notice.”

She hinted something of the sort to him, and for the first time he wounded her vanity by making her understand that her appearance in Parisian society had been a failure. There was no denying it. The pretended marvel had been analysed, discussed, and dismissed from notice. More than one great lady had decreed that there was nothing wonderful in her, no singular attractions, no transcendental charms. Paul de Lafarges had gone far to seek a foreign bride, and he had brought home one who was—well—not deformed, who had the dollish English red and white complexion, fine eyes, a fine figure, but then, *après!*

“The fact is they are jealous of you. But that is not all, you have not gone the right way to work—you do not under-

stand their ways," laughed the cynical yet somewhat disappointed husband. "It is through the influence of older women that young ones like you succeed in Parisian society. Take my advice and make up to one of them, it is an infallible rule. You are popular with the men, but that will not help you. The old women like to be deferred to, and they will protect you as Ulysses was protected in the cloud. Make friends as quickly as you can with Madame Lamont, and then no one will venture to say a word against you."

But Rosette set her red lips tightly, and determined in her own mind to do nothing of the sort. She had always hated matrons, and defied their espial, and if the Parisian matrons were a little faster and more worldly-minded than those with whom she had hitherto had to deal, it may perhaps be chronicled in her favour that she hated them all the more. She was still determined to try her strength and prove it amongst her fresh surround-

ings. She did not believe her husband when he talked of her failure. She had lost the terror which she once felt of Paul de Lafarges, and only thought he had no right to play the schoolmaster over her, and to interfere with her pet pleasures. He began to feel with some irritation that she might slip from his grasp. He liked her to enjoy herself, but he was determined to manage her. He had always felt—when he made a sacrifice in marrying her—that the absolutism of his possession would be its greatest charm in his eyes. And though he had not selfishly cared, in choosing a wife, to select one who should not be allowed to associate with any friends who admired her, yet he thought himself justified in wishing to hold his own against influences which might be injurious to him. He had always specially disliked the idea of a tribe of relations who might come prying into affairs that he wished to keep private; but he began to feel that there were acquaintances who might prove as bad as relations.



So on the next occasion he tried to exercise his marital authority. For not wishing Rosette to forget her riding, it was his custom to ride with her twice in the week through the shady woods of the Bois de Boulogne, and these rides which took place in the morning hours had contributed not a little to the good state of health which his wife still preserved, in spite of her dissipation. Paul de Lafarges was accustomed to do things well; and on Mondays and Fridays two thoroughbred horses, whose coats of satin contrasted favourably with the rough steeds of Llandyffryn, bore him and his wife with groom behind them down the Rue de Rivoli and thence to the sunlit avenue of the Champs Elysées, leading to the massive triumphal arch, and then the favourite greenery of the Bois de Boulogne.

On one of these occasions when Rosette was in her accustomed spirits, and when she said with sparkling eyes, "Oh, this

is delightful!" he remarked with his accustomed coolness.

"You have received another visit from Herman von Borgstal. He is no friend of mine, and I told you to deny yourself to him."

Her eyes which were attracted to his face, suddenly became grave. He did not explain that the interdicted visitor knew too much about his antecedents, and she mistook the purpose of his prohibition. She was stung and she was wounded, but she would not shew it by her manner.

"I will not be catechised—let us understand one another," she said, making a playful effort to assert herself.

"You welcomed him to my house, when I told you to refuse him," he continued, determined to punish her for her sauciness.

"I only tolerated, I did not welcome him," she answered, her lip trembling. "I could not be rude to him."

"I will teach you how to get through a difficulty," he said, as their horses ap-

proached a little stream of water which had been left by a late shower of rain in their road. "If you walk your horse through that puddle, it will certainly soil your riding habit, but if you clear it at one bound you will escape it without a speck," he continued, suiting his action to the word. "Do you understand me?"

"How oddly you shape your singular questions," she said flushing, till the tears were forced into her eyes. "Pray, what do you mean?"

He looked at her—at the unbroken arch of her white teeth, and the pretty turned-up corners of her mouth revealing unsuspected potentialities of will, and though it was his intention never to show too plainly the curled lasso in restraining her, he lost his presence of mind at that moment, for he was devoured by jealousy.

"I mean that you want the instinct of proper self-respect. You wanted it when you played false to Randal Stanton,

without caring for me. You may be highly principled enough, but you allow yourself too wide a latitude through your vanity. I have trusted you, but I must take care of you when you abuse your liberty."

His vehemence frightened her, as it had frightened her when first she was married to him. She looked at him with a stupefaction which showed that she did not take in the meaning of his words.

He was ashamed of his sudden outburst, and vexed when she answered him after a short silence with a bitter laugh.

"As to not caring about you, remember it was *you* who obliged me to marry you. I suppose we none of us marry our ideal husbands, and no men marry their ideal wives. I was very young when I ceased to bother myself about my ideal. But I mean to have my share of happiness—my feast of the good things of this life; you promised it to me, why should I not have it?"

He knew that the answer was not a natural one, for her voice sounded constrained, as if she were still hurt and bewildered. But it steeled him against her, and he gave up his theory that a wife's soul should be as a sheet of blank paper on which the husband could write exactly what suited him. It only remained for him to terrify her, and as if he thought that the mere assertion of his will was to mesmerise her at once into instant submission, he said, speaking shortly and sternly.

"Hear me once and for all. I have trouble enough to cover your debts, and I will only allow you to associate with the friends I choose for you. Living as you have been in Wales amongst clowns and misanthropes, you of course cannot understand the society to which you have lately been introduced. It will be my duty to help you to understand it. If you have no loyalty to me, it will be my duty to coerce you for your own sake to do what is proper."

## CHAPTER IV.

DE LAFARGES had made a mistake, and felt that he had made one. To bring Rosette to his home in Paris, and to tell her not to play the coquette, was as much as telling her not to breathe the air of the place to which he had introduced her. To have secrets from his wife, and to exact perfect unreserve from her, was, to say the best of it, apparently inconsistent, and Rosette vainly tried to hide her perplexities by mockery.


“Do be serious for five minutes,” he would say to her sometimes, looking at her with a look of singular fixity, as if he

would see into the very bottom of her heart. And the young wife, who was conscious she had nothing to hide, shrank from the look as irksome and resented his scrutiny. She would even turn pale at the fixed look, and avert her own face. Why did he look at her so pointedly with a boring eye fixed upon her? Why did he speak to her in a tone of such studied, chilling formality?

She had done her utmost to destroy any sensitive feeling he had began to cherish for her, and as he could have recourse to no physical argument for balancing the account, he was determined to make her feel the weight of his authority. It was something new for him to say to her, "do be reasonable!" and not to smile when she answered,

"It's of no use—I never was. I wasn't born to be reasonable."

Her anger had already begun to ebb—her penitence to flow. But he was cleverer than she was, and she could no



longer trust to her little expedients, or pride herself on her intuitive proficiency in Macchiavellian diplomacy.

“He wants me to be romantic,” she thought wonderingly; “but I don’t think I am at all. I am a woman like many other women—neither more sentimental, nor cleverer. I suppose that is the explanation,” she thought in despair. “Maitland once told me my mind was narrow. I suppose my head is narrow too—I was made and brought up so. I don’t think, for instance, I am any happier, now I am married than I was before, only my life is more tolerable—the world is so amusing. I like to be comfortable and enjoy myself, and I like to be admired; but I suppose I am not capable of any violent emotion—any very exalted sentiment. If I had the shadow of any once, it seems to have quite gone out of me.”

And he thought in his turn.

“She is as beautiful as ever, but I can no longer believe in her. Has she not



told me that all romances end in marriage? Has she not acknowledged that she never cared for me?"

The dimplings of merriment on her face were no longer lovable to him. The merry tone in which she spoke, as of freedom asserting itself, had become suddenly distasteful. He had married no Griselda, who would be senselessly submissive; but one who, when he reminded her that she had promised to obey, answered reflectively,

"It is a difficult question. I don't quite remember any promise of the sort. The Roman Catholic and Protestant services puzzled me, and then you told me not to think any more about it than if we had been married at a Registry Office."

"But it comes to the same thing?"

"Does it? I am not sure. I never interfere with *you*. I never ask you any questions about your ill-favoured friends. I am not half so bad as some wives. I

never nag at you—and most wives *do* nag,” she said, with a triumphant finale.

To bring the heavy artillery of moral reprobation to bear on her poor butterfly existence, her flagrant want of purpose, or her childish recklessness as to expenditure of money, would have been, as De Lafarges was forced to admit, absurd—as absurd as it would have been to attempt any psychological analysis about a nature in which there seemed nothing to analyse.

And then what right had *he* to meddle with moral reprobation? he had said to her one day angrily, when he had heard that her conduct was discussed by his friends.

“You are false and fair, like the rest of your sex,” and even then though she felt stung, and a tell-tale moisture came into her eyes, she answered,

“You try to speak unkindly to me, but I do not think you really mean it.”

He relented and asked,

“You do not hate me?”

“No,” she said; “of course I don’t. You are very cross and nasty lately, and sometimes I like to tease you.”

“You love me a little?”

“Yes;” she replied.

“Well—I have determined to put your affection to the test. We will go to our château in Normandy—Paris does not suit us, and I must confess that our expenditure does not suit my pocket.”

“I—I thought you were rich.”

“Not rich enough to satisfy such a fashionable lady as you. Ah—I see you are astonished,” he continued, laughing in his turn. “You are not yet accustomed to the meteor-like uncertainty of my proceedings. If you had been less extravagant and a little more docile, Paris *might* have suited us. But as it is, I have determined to sell the property here.”

“You have determined—and you never asked me.”

"It is not our way in France to consult our wives on these subjects;" he answered drily.

"But you are not a Frenchman, you are more than half English."

"My mother was an Englishwoman, and she liked the country. So will you like it. The country is delightful. You are not very well, and change of air will set you up. Make up your mind to the inevitable, *ma petite chatte*."

He had called her by the old epithet which he gave her when they were first married. His good humour was restored, for he had the best of it.

So this was the end of her little rebellion. It was crushed in the very bud, and only left her with burnt fingers for her pains. The *country*, which of all things she hated! Yet how could she with any appearance of a grievance complain? Her face was all in a flame, and she bit her lip as she said,

"You promised me I should see more of the world."

"I have kept my promise. I should have kept it still, had it not been for certain circumstances."

A sudden dimness came before the girl's bright eyes. He looked impassible, and took no notice of the coming tears. She was conquered; she had found her master.

## CHAPTER V.

HAVING brought about the event by a series of her own imprudences, Rosette tried to reconcile herself to the inevitable. And when all things were considered, a visit to her own château appeared very different from enforced exile in a dull cottage at Llandyffryn. Yet the change in her husband's manner made her feel uncomfortable, with a new fear that he was withholding from her possible details.

This fear was increased by the fact that, the day before her journey, he dismissed her favourite maid, and told his

wife that she was to travel alone. Existence without a maid appeared at first intolerable to Rosette, who was accustomed to have her dressing-room in a whirlwind of confusion after her constant and elaborate changes of costume. But when she was assured that in Normandy changes of dress would be no longer needed, things became altogether so bewildering as to admit of no further argument.

During the lunch which preceded their journey, Rosette was shy and rather subdued. The prospect of a long unbroken *tête-à-tête* with Paul, after the gaieties of the Paris season, was, to confess the truth, somewhat dreary to contemplate. But she had already regained her spirits when they reached the *chemin de fer*. She was young and confident, full of hope, and determined to make the best of things. So that though she was left to her own surmises during the greater part of the journey, and though

the route seemed to her rather dull, she amused herself with "Figaro," and by and by began to chatter a good deal. Her husband paid no more attention to her little stream of small talk than if it had been the twittering of a sparrow. It struck her that Hermann von Brogstall would have been a more agreeable travelling companion, and that Paul was very grim, glum, and disagreeable. She would have liked to tell him so, but there was a look in his face which daunted her, and reminded her of the strange lover who had cowed her at Llandyffryn. He was not much like a lover now, as he sat immersed in his own thoughts, apparently making elaborate calculations with a gold pencil-case which he had taken out of his pocket, on a little piece of paper.

When they reached Rouen, they took a *voiture*, and drove, as it seemed to the young wife, through a circuitous route. She was tired and hungry, and a cloudy



night had set in. A night when even the most merry might have been sad. There was only a crescent moon, and no panorama of stars.

"I am cold;" she said, shivering, and Paul took a cloak from a bundle of wraps, and put it round her shoulders. The action was not unkindly, but the manner was absent.

The road wound for some distance farther between richly-wooded hills, and had it been daylight, when they emerged from the wood, Rosette might have seen the plateau of the surrounding country, with here and there a stone cross, whilst to the left were the distant undulations of the ocean—a landscape, severe but grand, which Paul had told her was endeared to him by the recollections of his boyhood. As it was, she saw nothing when they alighted from the *voiture*, and in the dark avenue that led to the château she shivered again with cold.

"Does this lead to your castle? It

must be like the castle of Udolpho," she said, looking round her with another shudder at the black masses of foliage, over which she could see, by the light of a lantern, a pile of dusky red, which looked something like a building.

He did not answer, but gave a long whistle, and two or three men came out at the call. She noticed that these men were not in livery. There was a dramatic, mysterious air about everything, which would have been all very well in a theatre. The strangers took her boxes on their shoulders, and preceded her into the hall.

"Take care," said her husband's voice, as she tripped after them. "There are sharp stones, and your boots are thin."

"Why don't you have the road mended?" she asked, as a suspicion which was sharper than the stones seemed suddenly to penetrate into her heart.

It rained all that night, but in the morning, at a bright sunrise, Rosette again tried to be cheerful. The old red house with the tall trees, the pretty distant landscape, and the blue Norman sky looked more hopeful by daylight, and she even assured herself that as Spring-time and Summer would soon be coming, it might be possible to pass a few months in the place without being killed by *ennui*. She wisely ignored the Winter, as it was not her fashion to look far into the future, and to determine to remain there patiently all the Winter would have been excessive heroism for the new-born Parisian.

“What a quaint old place!” she tried to say when she met Paul, though her heart again sank within her, for a stern taciturn woman who clattered about in wooden shoes, and spoke in a dialect which was strange to her ears, had been the only female servant she had hitherto seen. Rosette did not know whether her husband was satirical or not when he hazarded

a few remarks about the patrimonial residence of the family, and talked about the older castle which dated from the time of Louis XIII., the ruins of which he assured her still decorated the park; but she guessed at the latent cynicism in his answer when she asked for further information about his family, and was told that "it was a dynasty of which the origin was lost in the darkness of night."

They breakfasted in a little ante-room, and then Paul left her. She fed a few chaffinches and sparrows with some crumbs of bread, then yawned and asked herself what was to be done next. There seemed only one thing to be done. So, after rallying her courage, she ventured on a voyage of discovery into the other parts of the house.

Here everything daunted her. The gloomy furniture, the old-fashioned mirrors, and the venerable and ancestral portraits filled her with dismay.

She only peeped into the rooms, which were dark and dingy with a beauty of antiquity which did not recommend itself to her taste. Yet her discoveries had set her thinking, and she returned to her husband with the face that was still so young and fresh, now dismally clouded.

He was occupied, much as he had been occupied in the railway-carriage; with the difference that numbers of papers, like bills, were now spread out before him. Her interruption did not seem to please him, and when she said to him,

“You must do up the rooms,” he answered,

“The rooms are handsome enough.”

“Why, dust and tarnish seem to have fallen on everything; they are in a perfectly shocking state.”

“And dust and tarnish must remain, unless I sell the things by auction.”

Her face fell more and more, as she expostulated in dismay,

“Don’t you mean to give parties?”

“Most certainly I do not. The *château* is miles away from the nearest town. I don’t care much for the people in the neighbourhood, and see as little as I can of them.”

“What can you have to amuse you?”

“I do not always stay here.”

“But I—you don’t suppose it is possible for *me* to stop here without you?”

“We will see about that;” he answered with a meaning smile.

“What,” she asked in despair, “can I possibly have to amuse me?”

“You can read; you have a garden; you can occupy yourself like other women;” he answered, with the bitter satire which was beginning to make her feel desperate.

“Your garden has no flowers.”

“Has it not? You can plant them. The Summer is coming, you can do as

you like. Think of the natural poetry of the site—the beauty of the timber.”

“Have *you* been contented with the poetry?”

“Perfectly,” he answered drily, “when I have come on a pilgrimage to it once a year, to refresh my memory with the poetical recollections of my infancy.”

“You are mocking me. Why even the trees of which you speak are most dismal. The branches are so overgrown that you cannot see the sun.”

“Ah, you are fond of the sun! Well, we can trim the trees a little. What do you think of the lake?”

“That horrible piece of water. Do you call it a lake? It may have been a lake once! But now it is given over to the frogs—it is covered with duckweed!—I would have the duckweed cleared, and the pond drained, and then it might be tolerable with a pleasure-boat upon it.”

"Your tastes are rather expensive ones," he said with a slight frown.

"Well, as it remains now, one might think the lake was haunted."

"Madame boasts she is not imaginative," he remarked with a sneer, which was intended to put an end to the conversation. It was the climax to his cruelty, for he had never before called her "Madame."

For the first time she altogether regretted her marriage—remaining motionless, her red under-lip pushed out in childish discontent, and a creepy coldness coming over her as she thought of the horror of being left alone in that dreary castle at night.

"He *cannot* mean it," she thought; "he knows that the very threatening is enough to cow me like a slave. But, oh! he will *never* carry it out; he cannot be so unfeeling."

It was not only that the country was generally repulsive to her, but that this



out of the way place in Normandy seemed to have a sinister character. She fancied she heard noises from the walls when it was dark, and was convinced that there were nocturnal groanings from the woods. She slept with lighted candles, in a state of abject terror.

"Very fine," she said, "but savage," when Paul pointed out the view to her from the neighbouring hills. "Very fine, but awfully savage! I feel as if I were on the top of a monument."

"You must have felt so in Wales," he retorted quietly.

"Yes, you know very well I could not bear Llandyffryn;—the hills were much worse there—but then Maitland was there, and Harry. And there were no robbers in Wales. You have robbers in Normandy."

"Ruffians who stop you with pistols—your purse or your life! Never you mind, I will not let them hurt *you*!" he answered with a smile which only irritated her.

"What are you going to do?" she asked him the next morning.

"I have business."

"Always business," she said complainingly; "you used to tell me that in Paris, when those horrid men came to see you. But then it did not matter. I had the sights of Paris, and my maid to talk to—and plenty of novels."

"You can have novels here. I will have them fetched from St. ——"

"You know it is different," she said, tapping her foot on the old carpet with evident vexation.

"*How* different? Be reasonable."

"I meant to be very reasonable—very gay and very happy when you first brought me here; but I did not expect *this*. I am not, as you know, generally afflicted by strong feelings, but sometimes I cannot help saying what I think. And to be buried alive without companions in a place like this ——"

"Without companions! *I* am here."

"*You!* but you are always busy. I am sure I don't know why; and even when we are together you might be dumb or a baby, for all you say to me."

He looked at her pouting lips—her moist eyes like wet violets, glistening beneath the twinkling eyelids, and thought to himself: "The soft thing is getting the better of me again, as when I was first doomed to my fate. I never expected much from her even when I made her my wife. I don't pretend to have experienced the shock of disillusion. But she belongs to me, and I must protect my penates."

From that time he devoted his spare hours to making the bondage less galling to Rosette. On one evening he took her down a soft decline of green banks which led to the borders of the river—a river with clear water which wound like a blue and white ribbon amongst the trees which she thought so dismal. But she only seemed to see the roofs of houses belong-

ing to the neighbouring town, and overwhelmed him with entreaties to take her there—entreaties which he determinately disregarded.

He was impatient, and lost his pity for her when he found her so hard to please. For this part of Normandy was charming at this season of the year. Even its roads had hedges of hawthorn which perfumed the country, and a profusion of young verdure constellated with wild flowers, was beginning already to adorn the woods and the fields.

“If she had a particle of poetry in her nature, she would be delighted,” he said to himself.

But all women are not poetical, and Rosette only grumbled, “I could never get into ecstasies over this sort of country. It is so uninhabited, it seems to me like a desert. And as to your *château*, I feel as if I shall have my throat cut in it. I am sure somebody or other must have been murdered here years ago.” And

then she would add with a little sigh, "He doesn't care for the prospect—it's of no good for him to pretend he does. I don't believe he left Paris simply for the sake of the prospect."

## CHAPTER VI.

SOMETIMES Paul went away for days together "to amuse himself," as Rosette bitterly thought, while she—her little cup of happiness spilled—was left to the old life which had become so sad and weary to her during the Winter days at Llandyffryn, but which was infinitely sadder and wearier in the loneliness of a foreign country. She tried to submit without protest to the *rôle* assigned to her, but her daily experience of it steeled and hardened her against her husband.

For there is no solitude so great as that of a country house in France, when

even the neighbouring town cannot be reached without horses, and Rosette (who was not a Roman Catholic) had no confession to go to, and even the village curé did not come to see her.

There are none so solemn as your humorists when the world goes wrong, and Rosette who might have sat for a portrait of "Joy," when she was amused to her heart's content, was now the most perfect incarnation of "Melancholy." She was sad all the day, and when the night came she was sadder still. The horrible contrast between her expectations and the reality was continually enhancing her sadness. To a nature like hers, formed for continual merriment, pain was unalloyed evil, and *ennui* the worst of maladies. By that malady she was now attacked.

During the days when Lafarges was absent, Mariana in the Moated Grange could not have been more despairing than the poor young bride whose light-heartedness had once gained for her the nickname

of "Fairy." She hated the distant prospect with its pale osier beds, and its silvery river, and began to loath the rich magnificence of the Spanish chestnut trees, She had a horror of the antique château, with its solid masonry strong enough to suggest days of past grandeur, and its roofing now replaced by coarse polished tiles. In the Summer the swallows built beneath the overhanging eaves; but the swallows were no companions for Rosette. She cared nothing for the pigeons that strutted and cooed as the Summer weather came on; for the peasants who clattered about the lanes in their sabots, or for the speckled poultry, some of which flew impudently into her lap, and pecked at her listless hands, showing how they had been accustomed to be fed.

Whilst the Spring days had continued to be chilly, she had been a little distracted by the bright wood fire, and the amusing occupation of building up the logs and trying the effect of the



bellows on the flame. But now even this occupation failed her. There was not even the visit of a *blanchisseuse*, for all the washing was done on the premises, and Rosette began to wonder if she were to be left for ever to the enlivening companionship of a few cocks and hens, whilst the place began to feel to her like a God-forgotten place. If there had only been a railway to it, or if the people in the neighbourhood had but visited her! In the bitterness of her longing for a little human companionship, Rosette would even have made a friend of the servant whom she had at first remarked, and whom she began to suspect of being a spy employed by De Lafarges,—a woman, dressed in the neat costume of the country, in a large white cap and short petticoat which displayed her ankles. She thought this woman appeared to be unnaturally grave for her age, and she sometimes fancied that she looked at her as if she pitied her. But it was in vain that

she attempted to question her about her master. She shook her head as if she were deaf and dumb, or took refuge in her patois. "Very likely," thought the despairing mistress, "there are others of these strange creatures hidden somewhere in the kitchen. There are the men, who run away if I try to come near them. They are all of them savages or idiotic."

"I have no actual grievance to complain of," she would confess sometimes to herself, as she walked alone in the grounds. "My husband would not be called actually cruel to me, though *I* may think so. Yet why should he busy himself in the provinces if it were not for the sake of revenging himself on *me*? Our house in Paris was a charming rendezvous. Plenty of people came to see me there, and nobody thinks of coming *here*."

It did not mend matters when she went on to reflect that Paul belonged to a

that sort of thing myself—but I can't bear to hear you talk in that way. If that is your creed, it is very empty and terrible."

She spoke with difficulty, and could never warm and brighten under his looks. And when once, yielding to that overwhelming impulse to confession which is said to have undone Eugene Aram, he told her the story of a man who had squandered all his property at Monaco—who had ruined other men, and had often enriched himself, who was dreadfully pinched now through unusual extravagancies; but who had ventured on a new experiment which would bring him in hundreds, and how it was to be hoped that the hundreds would bring in thousands,—she heard him with downcast eyes, uninterested in the story.

"Don't you pity the poor wretch?" he asked her, "especially when you hear that his present difficulties have been hastened by a reckless squandering on the part of

his wife. Would you tolerate the position if *you* were his wife?"

She did not answer him. The cry of a bird, as it flew past them to the tall weeds of the pond which had not yet been drained, startled her at that minute, and she said,

"That is one of the dismal sounds—I hear them always at night—especially when the wind soughs through the trees like a Gregorian chant—and I fancy the place ought to be haunted; it makes me feel quite eerie; let us go," she said, putting her hand on his.

"The wife of the man of whom I have been speaking would be glad of such a retreat," he answered, angry as he always was when she alluded to her superstitious fears.

She had not courage to answer him, but she thought with a sigh,

"I wonder he does not ask himself if all the pretty retreats in the world can be worth the sacrifice of

liberty. To live sometimes in a *tête-à-tête* with a man who frightens me, who has not the same tastes as myself, and who is often absent from me. With never any conversation—never any visits—never the theatre—never any balls—oh, I cannot live if this continues !”

But she had ceased to be expansive with Paul, and only told him that she had a headache when he noticed her altered appearance, and asked her if she was well.

“A headache?” he said coldly ; “a very common complaint with idle women ! You would cease to have headaches if you were to occupy yourself a little more.”

## CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning she gained courage enough to ask Paul if they were to be "always alone?"

"Why do you call it alone?" he said, a little sharply, "we are together."

"But that is like being alone."

He shrugged for the only answer.

"Don't be angry," she pleaded, with a meekness she had learnt lately, "I only meant it would make a change for us if we had a little company."

She noticed a slight contraction of his eyebrows, as if this were not his

view of the case, and she continued more faintly.

"There are houses within a few miles of us, but the people in them don't visit us."

"You must try to be contented," he said abruptly, "with the happiness I have provided for you—however insufficient that happiness may seem to you."

He spoke in a firm voice which did not admit of reply, and she did not try to answer him. Yet the feminine quickness, which is often independent of intellectual cleverness, and which had been one of her characteristics in former days, but which seemed to have deserted her in her recent depression, suddenly made her suspect that he had not given her the true reason when he took her away from Paris. She looked the suspicion as she raised her eyes to his, and her silence did not hide the secret revolt of her heart.

"You are dull because you do not amuse yourself," he said, as her little foot again beat its impatient measure on the carpet.

"But what am I to do?"

"I thought what pleased you best was to do nothing," he answered, trying to force a laugh.

"Not always! There are moments when one feels the need of distraction."

"Well—can't you sew and embroider like other women? And I have brought you a lot of thrilling tales—you can amuse yourself with *them*."

He felt the satire of his advice, when he saw her that evening trying in vain to read the novels from the library in the yellow and blue covers, which she had at first looked at with a sort of hope; opening them here and there, and letting them drop on her lap—or plunging hap-hazard into the middle of a page.

"*Pauvre petite chatte*," he thought;



“not much doubt about her being broken in now. But the shock has been too rude for her, and both of us are suffering. There is an end to happiness in married life when a woman begins to feel the need of resignation. If she were only a child that I could bring her some toys—a doll’s-house that opens all at once;—coloured pictures, or a dancing Punch,—but how am I to amuse this *woman*? I would rather see her a little boisterous,—or a little fast—as she has been when she was excited.”

He looked at her with a half groan. She was sitting in the garden. The books had fallen to the ground, and her hands were joined listlessly across her knees in an attitude of listless abandonment. All her little coquetries of dress had disappeared. Her pretty hair was even rough, and she had forgotten the ribbon with which she snooded it. Her eyes were looking at vacancy, and there was an air of melancholy in her whole

expression, which he had never thought it possible for her face to wear. He could not help noticing that she had grown thin, that the colour had faded from her cheeks, and that there were bistre circles under the eyes.

She was like a tropical bird, transported to a cold climate, and regretting the eternal Spring of the country it could never see again—pining after the sun and flowers, and dying slowly of grief.

“No one can blame me,” he thought to himself. “If she had had but a *dot*, they might have said I manœuvred for her. But who but myself would have cared to marry this penniless girl? She does not look strong. And why should she not be content to live with care and indulgence out of a world the excitements of which might be too much for her health, and in a home as agreeable and luxurious as this? This quiet country life may after all be necessary for her.”

He thought he would try to get her to acknowledge the truth of his arguments—anything would be better than to let her fall into this stupor.

“So you are tired of being banished out of the world—are you, little one?” he said, sauntering towards her, with an attempt at being jaunty. “You are *très tourmentée* about nothing, you have sea-air here, and pure country breezes. You are looking delicate just now, and it is a comfort for me to know that when I am called away from you I can leave you in one of the healthiest spots in France.”

“I am tired of being by myself,” she said, suddenly breaking silence. “I never pretended to like the country, and the country makes me afraid. I can never walk out in it without the dread of getting my throat cut. Take me back to Paris,” she continued, with all her emotions strung up to quivering pitch. “I would rather be a poor *ouvrière* if I might walk on the Boulevards with their

continual noise, their pretty shops, and their animated faces ! Even an *ouvrière* has her few hours for amusing herself every evening, and enjoys herself a good deal when she is pretty—but I—I am stifled here !”

“Don’t agitate yourself unnecessarily ; there were dangers for you in Paris which it was desirable to avoid,” he said, with a pitying smile, which he tried to keep from being satirical. But Rosette was desperate, and no longer fearful about offending him.

“If this sort of thing is to be prolonged, I shall *die*,” she said, in her despair.

Just then the sound of a church bell came floating to them from a distance. It was one of the churches of St. —, and catching at every straw to help her out of the difficulty, she said how glad she would be to go to a church—anything for a change ! She had never expressed the wish before ; on the contrary, she had always pitied the Roman Catholic devotees for their lives regulated and absorbed

by a round of religious duties, their meditations at the foot of the altar, and their long offices in the Roman churches; and though she was nominally Protestant, she cared still less for the Protestant services.

"To-morrow is Sunday," she said, "take me to the Cathedral."

"You can pray in your own room," he answered, with vexatious phlegm.

And she in her anger exclaimed,

"Oh, that is not the same thing! You *know* you have some reason for it—some mysterious reason for shutting me up from everybody, and refusing to take me to public places."

"*Had* he such a reason?" she asked herself seriously, for the first time, when she saw how his pallid face suddenly flushed scarlet. Had her arrow, flung at a venture, hit him through the joints of his armour at last? Self-preservation, she remembered, was the law of his nature, and he was the man to sacrifice

everything to it without a particle of remorse. She did not tell him her thoughts, and was far enough from guessing how *he* was thinking of her at the same time as of a woman to whom he had sacrificed his own interests, whom he had won at a serious cost, and whom he had tried to make happy—and it had ended like *this*.

“All women are alike,” he thought, as he made one or two slow paces up and down the room, and then sat down, his head resting hopelessly on his hands. “All are alike, ungrateful, lying, flippant, and changeable!” He had always seen through them before. He had valued pretty women much as he valued choice wines and good cigars, but he had set no higher value on them.

And he thought he had been wise in so valuing them! For here was one who had taken his heart by storm, and whose faults were most glaringly on the surface, and yet he could not help loving her in

spite of those faults. He seemed to lose himself in his own reflections.

"I am a fool," he thought, "to let myself be troubled by her childish threat that if this sort of life does not end soon it will kill her. Yet I see very plainly that she is most miserable, and that *I* who love her have caused her this misery. Ah—why did I ever meet her? Why did I ever suppose that a better life might be in store for me?"

He turned round on her abruptly, and said,

"It would be mockery for me to take you to the Cathedral. But you can ride on horseback. Why did I never think of that?"

"I cannot ride any more," she said, shaking her head. "It would do me more harm than good through these stony lanes. I think I have lost the little nerve I used to have; there are times when I am afraid of a horse, and even of a donkey."

"You are a coward, you used not to be One."

"It is not my fault if I am. As a child I was a coward, and since you have left me alone at this château, I have lost my nerve. I am afraid of your hills, afraid—of everything."

"Then," he said, with sudden determination, "we will drive. I will drive you to St.—, to-morrow afternoon."

Her heart beat a little quicker as he made the suggestion. She was like a caged bird beating its wings against the wires of its prison. But when the time came for the promised drive, it was spoilt by a mere accident. They passed a carriage full of well-dressed people who looked at them with curiosity. But her husband made only a slight bow to the inmates of the carriage, and it seemed to her that he drove faster, as if he wished to avoid them.

"Why did they look at us so, not as



if they were admiring? "There is nothing particularly disagreeable about us?" she inquired.

And she noticed that he did not answer. All her pleasure was gone as she thought over the little episode, and in her mind exaggerated the look of disparagement which the passers-by had cast at her husband. What could it mean? Her curiosity was excited, but she said nothing to Paul, observing that he waited until it was dusk before he took her into the town, as if he did not wish to be noticed by any of the passers-by—that he drew his hat rather closely over his eyes, and that once or twice the arm on which her hand rested, trembled.

"Was the town full of mysterious dangers?" she asked herself, as she also noticed that he avoided the open market-place, and passed beyond the thoroughfares to a corner behind the church, making a pretence of showing her a group of quaint, tumbledown, gabled houses with vines

flinging their festoons from one tiled roof to another. Then he led her into an unsavoury tanyard and bid her look at a distant view of the church. There was a large proportion of darkness in the picture from the old timbers which absorbed the light, and the increasing gloom of the evening, corresponding with the disappointment which was gathering in her heart. The church, with the quaint old street behind it, had no more attraction for her than the view of the river which could be seen behind it, with windings which could be traced amongst the poplar-fringed hills.

Had she seen the houses by daylight she would not have admired them, though from some of the windows hung sprays of nasturtium and moneywort festooning the ancient casements from which they trailed in pots, and though artists came from far and wide to study their rickety projections. She would have felt more interest in the inevitable washer-

women soaping their linen on the flat stones beneath them, and then rinsing it in the running water of the stream. Or she would have liked to have visited the place in the bright morning sunlight, with the noise and bustle of the market vendors selling their creamy cauliflowers, their scarlet tomatoes, their rich-coloured fruit, their primrose-coloured butter, and baskets full of eggs.

It was the stir of life and the clatter of tongues which she had begun to long for, even if it were a vulgar clatter. The gesticulations and harangues of the men in their light blue blouses, or the squabbles of the women in their short jackets and grisette caps, would have been as music to her ears, so weary was she for change of some sort.

But it seemed like a mockery of change to be taken to the town when the market was over, and when only a few people were lingering about the streets. Was Paul ashamed of her that he was so

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anxious not to be identified, or had he another wife hiding away somewhere in the neighbourhood? Could it be possible that he was afraid of meeting some one who might tell her the truth? The idea flashed upon her, and made her cold with a new sensation of dismay, as she noticed his look of relief, and almost satisfaction, when they returned again late at night to the solitary château.

Somehow the place had never looked so awful to Rosette. Misty rain had come on as they drove through the wooded valley, and though the moon had risen high overhead, it was every now and then veiled with rolling masses of dark cloud. An owl flew across the road in front of them and uttered a sharp ominous cry. The pale glimmer of the river could be seen through the trees, and the young wife shivered and thought that the place had never looked more melancholy and deserted than when Paul helped her to alight beneath the green-shuttered windows.

Her painful doubts deprived her of rest and troubled the little sleep which came to her late in the morning, so that she woke pale and really ill.

She even determined to hazard a question, and to ask Paul in mingled tones of wretchedness and coaxing why he was so misanthropical and afraid of meeting his neighbours?

"Talk of what you understand," he said more sharply than usual. "Laziness is rather a good thing in its way when it keeps little girls from teasing about things that don't concern them," he added in the same breath.

And she, Eve like, decided that a matter which he kept from her, must be of all others that which concerned her most nearly.

## CHAPTER VIII.

IT was a new wound, worse than that from which Rosette had already been suffering, and the new form of suffering showed itself in the alteration of her manner. The atmosphere of depression in which she had lately been existing, and which had shown itself not only in the languor of her speech, but in the weariness of her face, and the very droop of limbs, now gave place to a little air of determination. The stretch of restraint in which she had hitherto been living, was suddenly relaxed, for a stronger feeling had come into play than even her terror

of her husband. For here was a terrible riddle for which she had not the key—a mystery in which nobody could help her, if she did not help herself. Anything she thought would be better than going on in silence with this mystery hanging over her head. She preferred to take the bull by the horns at once, whatever it might cost her. She had heard that a determined woman could always manage a determined man, by the mere force of holding out, and she meant to hold out till Paul told her the truth. She did not look much like a determined woman, it must be confessed, as she appeared the next morning with a nervous twitching of the pretty lips which she tried to close tightly in defiance. She let her skirts trail behind her, and drag with a scratching sound on the floor, as if the sweep of the extra drapery would help her to assert herself. And yet as she stood shivering and clasping her hands together at the breakfast table, her little stock of courage was already ebbing away.

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“What is the matter with you?” asked Paul in some amazement, attempting to put his arms round her as he gave her the usual kiss. But she slipped from his embrace with one of her supple movements, and said in a tragic tone.

“Why do you try to cheat me? Would it not be better to confess at once to me how you have deceived me? I should think a little better of you if you would tell me all the truth.”

“You are charmingly imaginative,” he said in a cold hard tone. “Had you not better try to recover your natural self?”

She knew she had exasperated him, and yet her suspicion was only strengthened. For had not his expression changed? Had he not grown pale with annoyance when she spoke to him? He had wonderful command over the muscles of his face, yet his countenance had darkened, and he had involuntarily winced. But she told herself that he had been guilty of such baseness, such treason, that she could not



even pity him if she made him suffer.

"Does he think I don't know the difference between right and wrong, or that I am a baby that he is to do as he likes with me, and keep me in perfect ignorance?" she asked herself in her indignation. "I must force him to know the difference. I daresay it was not right of me to make a runaway marriage. But my fault seemed scarcely to deserve the penalty I may have to pay for it."

"Rosette," he said to her with assumed calmness, after a few moments' silence, during which she had burst into angry hysterical tears. "Try not to be absurd. Pauline need not notice such an undignified exhibition. Talk sensibly to me for just a few minutes, if you can, and tell me, if you know what words mean, what is the matter?"

She noticed that he put the question anxiously, and that though he tried to laugh at her, this form of melodrama seemed to be really terrible to him. It

seemed as if their positions had suddenly been reversed. The terror which he could not hide, and which he had so often inflicted upon her, made her, now her turn had come, the more relentless to him. She came nearer to him, and looking at him reproachfully with the eyes which he had once said had no soul in them, dilating and darkening, she whispered,

“ *I know all !* ”

“ *All !* ” he repeated. He began to whistle, but a spasm of some feeling which she could not fathom swept over his face, and he turned it away lest she should see that he could not control it.

“ Yes ; ” she said, emphasising every word, “ you were married before you married me. I am not your true wife. Monster ! ” she continued, stamping her little foot in the vehemence of her grief. “ Send me home again ; I ought never to have believed in you. I ought to have known your true nature. ”

He turned round, and tried not to

laugh outright. But a smile of satisfaction escaped from his lips, as if he were relieved from some terrible anxiety.

“ You are out of your mind,” he said ; “ child, what ever put such a ridiculous suspicion into your little head ? Make what inquiries you like, and you can have your marriage certificate. Perhaps I was a fool to marry anyone, but if I am not married to *you*, I am certainly not married to anyone else.”

She was half-reassured—not entirely. The very quietness with which he had taken her accusation made her look upon him as if he were a complete abstraction from everything human, and made her the more certain that there was something mysterious about the house which she had not yet fathomed—something kept back from her. She had not yet come upon the secret, but she was very near it. “ It burns,” she said to herself, as the children say in their play ; and now she began to think that there might be a

relish of the romantic in the discovery, a smack of something dreadful, which might relieve the monotony of her present life, or even raise her out of the level of the common herd of women. A feminine desire to take the first opportunity which might present itself for revenging herself on her husband and making him repent of his tyranny, sharpened her wits at this crisis.

She found out that he occasionally received visitors who were not introduced to herself, in the suite of apartments which she had supposed to be never used, on the other side of the house. In his absence she took to exploring these apartments, being prepared to encounter all the horrors her imagination associated with them. She would not have been astonished if she had found sliding-panels, or lifting-tapestry, which disclosed doors leading to subterraneous passages. The novels of George Sand or of Alexandre Dumas had prepared her for such contingencies. But although the uninhabited

apartments wore just the gloomy look, and the general appearance of dust and neglect which suggested that some dark deed might have been wrought in them, and though her nerves were strung up to such a pitch that she would not have been surprised had she seen stains of blood upon the floor, or implements like daggers lying on the tables, her explorations were continued for some time without the discovery of anything dreadful.

On one occasion, indeed, when during her husband's absence she had been investigating these rooms, she dropped a bow which she wore on her dress, and her suspicions were again aroused by the fact that when Paul, who had picked up the bow, brought it back to return it to her, his face wore an angry look, and he requested her to keep to her own side of the house.

His angry look seemed to her indicative of guilt, and the fact that he did not

like her to wander into these rooms only stimulated her fears, and excited her curiosity. For a moment she trembled at the emphasis with which he spoke, and remained pale and breathless, and then making a vigorous effort to regain the piquant manner which had been habitual to her in days gone by, she asked pettishly, making a little grimace,

“Why?”

“Because you understand nothing about business.”

“Then the men who come to see you there, come——”

“On business.”

“What sort of business?”

“Well, if you particularly wish to inquire, the business on hand just at present is concerning the sale of the useless furniture.”

“You mean to sell the furniture?”

“Yes, by auction.”

She inquired no more, though she had at first intended to argue with him with

eagerness, and to attempt to get this weighty matter off her mind. For the first time she began seriously to suspect that she had been cruelly, purposely misled, that she was a victim and a dupe, and that everyone must have known the state of her husband's affairs but herself. The marriage from which she had once expected so much pleasure had brought her only misery, shame, and even poverty. But she had a plan, and her plan rested on a hope.

That all the furniture in the house was to be sold in some mysterious manner by auction would have been too disconcerting had she actually believed the assertion. But she hoped that the explanation was intended to mislead, and only continued—when she had the house to herself—to search more desperately for some secret spring or clue to the mystery. At last she was rewarded, though in rather a common-place way. For on one occasion she noticed that an unusually large picture

which had caught her artistic eye even when her mind was otherwise engaged, had been slightly displaced, and looking behind the picture, she found the door of a passage. She crept on a step or two and came to another door, which threw open another deserted salon. It was larger and more silent than the first, but the dust had accumulated on the faded draperies. Rosette was frightened at it, and crept back again into the passage which contained the green-baize cover of a billiard-table, and a few other discarded articles, but would also easily contain her own person; and in this cupboard Rosette determined to hide when mysterious conversations should be going on.

The occasion was not long in coming. For on the next of Paul's visits she was up one morning betimes, and it did not escape her observation that her husband was not pleased to see her.

"Already up," he said, "you are not generally so early."



His voice was dry and nervous, and he cut his words so short that they seemed to die away in his throat.

Quick as thought she slipped away towards the empty room.

"He will be expecting one of those ill-looking messengers, and he always sees them there," she said to herself. "I shall soon know what they are hiding from me. I am looking for the key of the enigma, and after a time I shall find it."

At the threshold of the room she met Pauline — the quiet waiting-maid — who made her the more certain that she ~~was~~ on the right track by placing herself before her, and saying,

"You had better not go there; the master will not be pleased if you pry into his affairs."

"I have a right to go anywhere I choose in the house, as well as other people," she answered, irritated by the impertinence of the woman's contradic-

tion, and adding with an air of bravado, "I can account to Monsieur for what I do myself, I am not a prisoner in his house."

The woman looked at her again as if she pitied her, as Rosette—a good deal excited—slipped into the first unoccupied room, her heart beating as if it would choke her, and hiding herself as she had intended, but taking the precaution of keeping the door of her hiding-place ajar, that she might hear all that was going on.

"Have I not searched enough?" she asked herself facetiously when her agitation subsided. "After all, what do I expect? Do I not know all about these rooms? I have examined every hole and corner of the house. Don't I very well know that Paul cannot be a Bluebeard, hiding from me the secret chamber which contains the corpses of his first wives?"

She began to think the step which she

had taken ridiculous, but it was too late to draw back. She remained for some time perfectly quiet without hearing or seeing anything, and the ardour of her resolution had time to cool. The recklessness of the strong desire which had said to her "Why not venture?" when she thought she might have an opportunity of finding out about Paul's "business," was giving way to her natural timidity. What if he should want the cover of the billiard-table, and come to open the passage-door? Could anything be more ridiculous than the figure she should cut? Rosette was frightened and hungry, with a strange creepy feeling of chilliness though the day was warm. Once she felt as if a cold hand had been passed down her spine, and began to believe in phantom residents in the château. She regretted her rash step a good deal, long before she was rewarded by hearing the boom of men's voices and knowing that one of them was her husband's.

She could not see anything through the chink of the almost closed door, or the room and the men would have been photographed for ever on her memory.

Nor did she in the least understand at first what she heard. Whether it was fright, excitement, or horror, she never knew. But her ideas had begun to be confused in her brain. It seemed as if her head had grown very thick, and as if she heard without understanding. Yet by degrees she recognised the fact that they were speaking of the very lake in the grounds which had always caused her such an indescribable shrinking, and it appeared that a man had really been drowned in that lake. Had he met with a violent death, or had he died by his own hand? She could not at all make sure. But that her husband was somehow connected with the tragedy, and that he had to pay these men hush-money, was evident enough. That something very

strange and odd had happened, and that Paul had been enriched by the poor fellow's death—so much she could comprehend from the murmur of confused voices. And that if her husband was not exactly in hiding on account of this, enough was known of his character in other respects to make him a marked man, avoided by his neighbours, also dawned upon her by degrees as she listened to the words of his accusers, whose object it was to wring payment for their silence, and if possible to intimidate Paul de Lafarges.

His wife was the first to doubt him. A fatal light seemed to illuminate the mystery which had so long been obscure to her. She had married a gambler—a black-leg—a homicide! The blow had struck her with the violence of a clap of thunder. She knew now that she had only been playing with fire. Her mind had been prepared in a vague way for something terrible, but she had by no

means realised what she should suffer if her childish fears should culminate in reality. It was as if for one moment she had been shaken out of her shallowness, her selfishness, her frivolity, as if in that moment she had attained the full stature of womanhood, and the soul which had been missing so long had been restored to her beautiful body. Her blood ran cold with horrid suggestions. Her imagination filled up the picture left by the disjointed words which she had overheard, with the blackest details. The paucity of servants in the deserted house, and the fact that the woman who waited on herself was unwilling to talk to her, seemed to throw light upon the mystery. What if she had not only married an adventurer who cheated at cards, but a *murderer* !

Shocking as the idea was, she dwelt on it till it became plausible. She wished she had not tried to make the discovery, but nothing could be more characteristic of the change which had taken place in

her than the fact that for the time she forgot her personal danger, as with eyes staring, lips apart, and pulses throbbing with excitement, she walked slowly as if weakened by recent illness to their own sitting-room (where she knew she should meet her husband) later in the day.

She was sitting in a low arm-chair, and did not see Paul when he came in to dinner. Her head was bent a little forward in an attitude which was best calculated to show the perfect lines of her figure, and her delicate profile. Her eyes were bent down and hidden by the white lids, pure like those of a child, whilst the shadow of the long lashes lay upon her cheek, which was very pale, and now and then her lips trembled slightly ;—another sign of her emotion.

Paul was struck by her beauty, and came nearer to her, more affectionately than usual. His heart yearned with a strange pain over the woman he loved.

But she shrank from him as he came close to her—stretched out her hand to keep him away—and then murmured in his own language, as if she had learnt a lesson, or as if she were speaking in her sleep,

“Those awful men—those dreadful men—I will not believe it—tell me it is not true! Tell me that one of them has invented it.”

He swerved aside as if she had dealt him an unexpected blow. Rosette had always retained her English accent, but his ears had never before been so lacerated by her false pronunciation. The lines about his face were tightly drawn, and there was a fierceness in it that appalled her, as he answered suddenly,

“Invented *what*? What childish nonsense is this? Some one must have been playing on your credulity.”

The cynical explanations which he was prepared to give no longer satisfied her. But she allowed a little pause



skilfully calculated, with a cunning which stood her instead of courage; and then as if something spoke in her in spite of her dread of him, or as if the greater fear had overpowered the lesser one, she gasped out.

“Ah—they say instincts are mostly before reason, and it was no wonder that I was forbidden to intrude into your real or supposed *cabinet de travail*—no wonder that I was afraid to be alone—I can never be left alone here again in these grounds with that terrible lake.”

She did not know exactly what she had said, as she looked up at him with wild eyes which only saw him vaguely, and which had a glazed look in them as if she were staring at vacancy. It was well for her that she could not observe the expression of his face, for there was a look in it she had never seen in it before—bitter—sarcastic—irritated—implacable.

For a few moments she was conscious of nothing, and then she knew that he was standing over her, and that he was threatening her with personal violence. And she heard his voice speaking in deepened, lowered tones, as if his rage were concentrated instead of effervescing.

“You must try to avoid putting me in a passion, or I may kill you one of these days.”

Then again she awoke to a fear that her own safety was endangered. And to her fevered imagination it seemed as if his angry eye attracted her by subtle magnetism, like the eye of a serpent attracting the helpless bird which it fascinates to its destruction, and she attempted to look away from him, but could not. She made an effort to recover herself—in vain. Her beautiful face was overspread by a livid pallor. A cold perspiration broke out on her forehead, and a few minutes afterwards

she was taken by one of those hysterical fits which women of her description always have ready for an emergency.

## CHAPTER IX.

THERE had been an interval during which her shrieks had filled the house, and during which she was carried to her own apartment, and left in silence, to feel as if the blood were surging to her face and stinging to her feet, and as if a thousand sledge-hammers were beating on her head. An interval during which she had been left in the darkness, and had endeavoured in vain to separate the false from the true; to remember how much was real, and how much might be due to the influence of the French

romances which for months past had constituted her intellectual food.

But when she fell asleep, she murmured in her dreams.

“Those awful men—those dreadful men!” or, “From the first day I entered his house I knew he was a deceiver.”

And when she awoke she was shivering like the vibrating of a tightly stretched chord. And so the French Doctor who had already received his instructions concerning her state found her, and after remarking on her furred tongue, bloodshot eyes, and galloping pulse, talked a good deal in a scientific manner about “the nerves,” and ended by prescribing a very inadequate prescription, and giving orders that the patient was to be amused, and kept from painful thought.

Her husband had looked once into her sick-room, but had not attempted to come in. A metamorphosis had taken place in both their lives—a change which reminded him of a broken kaleidoscope,

which could be no more shaken into patterns; and to affect an interest in his wife's condition, under the present circumstances, seemed to him as if it would be ghastly and unprofitable labour.

So for days Rosette was left to herself, attended only by the female servant with the unnaturally grave face, to whom she had originally taken an aversion.

Her main idea during these days were that she herself was threatened by personal danger in the château. Innocent as things might be in themselves, she put a peculiar construction on them, and everything seemed to be preparing the way for some terrible catastrophe.

In vain did she ply Pauline with frequent questions, only alarming her by her wild ways and exaggerated manner.

"Of course the master has no idea of your being deranged," this servant said

on one occasion in a cold tone—her sympathies evidently ranging themselves with “the master.”

And Rosette, listening to the words, wondered vaguely if they were true. For there seemed to be a revolution in her whole being, as if her reason were really leaving her.

“What would be the use of my repeating what I heard? Need I think that anyone would credit the wild story, even if I could testify against my husband?” she asked herself one day, when the Doctor had visited her as usual, and ordered “nourishing food” as a liniment for her broken heart. She had heard him say. “She must eat—let her have anything she fancies.”

And so they heaped her plate with dainties—heedless of the fact that she did not touch them, and did not sleep. She began to long even to see Paul’s face again, much as she dreaded it. Anything for a change—anything to break the dull

monotony of this weary sickness. But Paul had gone away—she could not wonder at it. She would not have wondered if he had never seen her again.

Days passed into weeks, and still she did not go out. She had a horror of venturing into the grounds—a dread, as she had said, of seeing the lake. Soon she began to have an equal terror of her own bed-room. When the wind howled round the buildings at night, she listened to it with new sensations of awe. The very curtains of the bed seemed to flutter and appal her. Was it possible that the spirit of the drowned man could appear to her? Were his bones still there in that horrible piece of water, or had they given them Christian burial? These, and a hundred other questions which she could not answer, and the presence of morbid thoughts running continually in one groove, began to weigh intolerably on a mind which had never been duly balanced. Her own sense of the probable was never



called in to aid her. Her husband had so isolated her in his gloomy house that she had forgotten she was living in a country of newspapers, in an age of observation and civilisation. At last there came a change.

It came to her in the form of a letter, which was quite an unusual event in the uniformity of her present existence. It purported to be from "one who pitied her," and part of it ran thus :

"I beg of you to have confidence in me and to appoint an hour when I can meet you."

She answered after much thinking.

"I do not give my confidence to a stranger; but if you wish to tell me anything of importance, you will find me at home to-morrow morning."

In the morning the writer of the letter was announced, and proved to be a farmer in the neighbourhood.

But the woman who waited on Rosette was nervous and uncomfortable, and after

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fidgetting about the room, said to her mistress,

“If I may venture to say so to Madame, Monsieur will be very sorry to hear that Madame has received this stranger. Madame will lose little by denying herself to him. He is a visionary with an evil tongue, and has a bad reputation in the country.”

Rosette paid little attention to the warning. She received the evil-tongued stranger, and heard all that he had to say to her—a strange avidity for suffering seemed to have taken possession of her.

Then for the first time she heard that the house in Paris had not been Paul's, and that he had only taken it for the season, during which he had launched forth into unusual extravagance. Neither had the present château ever belonged to the De Lafarges; it had been the property of an unfortunate young Count who had died at the age of twenty, drowned, as it

was generally supposed, by a mad suicidal act, after he had gambled away everything which had descended to him from his ancestors. It was rumoured that the furniture of the château would soon be put up to auction, and that the estate would be sold to pay the debts of a set of rascals who had profited by the poor fellow's death.

In that respect Paul had spoken truly. But Monsieur de Lafarges, as Rosette's informant told her, had reasons of his own for wishing to keep up the appearance of magnificence. He darkly hinted that there had been worse than suicide, and that it was unsafe for the young wife to trust her life in De Lafarges' hands. She was advised to communicate at once with her friends, and she returned to her room with the full intention of endeavouring, if possible, to outwit her husband; for it was no wonder that the people round would not associate with the interloper.

"He has a terrible set of associates," her informant had explained. "In Paris he has allies amongst the very *canaille*. Ah, *voyons!* he has made a fortune twice, thrice, and lost it. Bah! he may lose it again. What matters it that he was well-born and educated in England? I could tell some strange stories!"

"Don't, don't!" the poor young wife had entreated, hiding her face in her hands, and pale with cowardly terror, "I could never endure anything that was horrible."

"I can never stay here," she said to herself, when she found herself once more alone, without having the slightest idea of sifting the truth of these stories. "But how am I to get away? Paul never comes near me, and even if he did I could not let him know how much I have found out about him. Before I found out the extent of his wickedness, I had left off appealing to him for mercy. I might as well speak to a stone."

Meanwhile, De Lafarges had determined that for the present it would be wiser for him not to see his wife again. He had no thought of confiding in her, though his conscience excused him of any intentional cruelty to her.

"She irritated me for the moment, but after all she can have found out nothing of any consequence. She seemed from the first as if she thought some unworthy game had been played upon her when I took her away from Paris, and this suspicion has been intensified by some gossip that has reached her, poor child!"

He believed that she would "come round" after a time, and, meanwhile, left her to herself, for the difficulties as to any present union between them seemed to be greater than ever. The harmony of their life had been so seriously troubled, that it seemed hopeless to attempt to re-establish it at once. What could it avail to tell this mere child of the dark secrets

of his past life, his remorse, his partial repentance? She had heard but half-truths, could he trust her with the whole?

"It is over," he thought. "A woman who glories in her intellectual inferiority, because she is vain of her appearance, may be likened to a bright-coloured bird, a pretty kitten, or any other domestic animal. You see her jump about her cage, you whistle an air to her, you caress her in passing, you admire her graces, and then you engage in other more serious recreations. But directly the pet passes out of its proper rôle, and interferes with these other concerns, it becomes no plaything, only an impediment and a nuisance."

For weeks he tried to reason in this way, but his heart contradicted the arguments of his reason. In vain he sought to combat the various influences which were associated with the places, hours, and circumstances which memory con-

nected with his pretty wife. The ineffaceable traces of the companion who had lived with him for months past, seemed to be stamped upon his soul. Floating perfumes in the air seemed to recall Rosette. He remembered the attitude in which she would sit, and how her golden head would rest on her hand. He remembered the supple form draped in the folds of the cashmere dress, which she had generally worn at the château, when she had ceased to pay much attention to her personal adornment. He seemed to see her profile in the waning evening light, he seemed to hear her voice in any chance strain of music.

“Poor child!” he said, “I loved her; and I have added to my other crimes that of making her miserable. I had just a glimpse of Heaven for a time when I thought of marrying her; but I have been like a multitude of men—infatuated.”

He returned home drawn by an influ-

ence which he could not have defined. But when he attempted to see his wife, and when he smiled and caressed her, she turned from him with a little cry of horror, and answered his half confessions with a glance of bitter disdain.

"Let me go," she said, "I am stifled in this horrible house. And the garden is even worse to me. I cannot breathe in it. Let me go anywhere—back to England." She had meant to hurl scornful defiance at him, but her strength suddenly collapsed, and she shrank away from him in an attitude of humiliation, like a terror-stricken animal.

"*You are mad!*" he said, slowly, "the doctor is right. Your hallucinations are such that you are nearly wild at times."

His words were a sudden astringent for her excited feelings. She raised herself up, flushing with pain and surprise.

"The doctor?" she forced herself to say. "I will ask him—I do not believe



it. I am sure no doctor can think that such absolute seclusion can be good for me?"

"Ask him, by all means," he said, in the tone of a dispassionate philosopher. "I have had, and I wish to have the best professional advice for you. It was the doctor who told me to interdict any sentimental visiting."

He saw every atom of colour die out of her face.

"You are joking," she cried, with hot hands drawn rigidly across her forehead; "joking, when you tell me that the doctor tries to make out I am—*mad*!"

"He considers you a monomaniac," said Paul, with a singular smile. "You need not use the stronger word unless you wish to prove his assertion. Under careful treatment we will hope you may amend."

So the interview terminated, but when on the next day Rosette shewed an inclination to leave the grounds, she was told

that Pauline had orders not to let her go out.

"It is a mere jest," she said. "Cannot I be treated like a reasonable being? Am I not to be allowed to call my very soul my own?"

She had ceased to have much communication with her own kindred after the life in Paris, which had so little in common with the life at Llandyffryn. But that day she wrote her first natural and unaffected letter to her sister—a letter in which the fine language by which she had hoped to impose upon them, altogether disappeared, and which was full of dashes, blots, and frantic erasures.

"They tell me that I am ill," she complained, "and must have my breakfast in my own bedroom, and they make me believe that I am mad whenever I have nervous ailments. It is given out that I lead a secluded life because it is good for my health—I see no one—not even the few magnates who have houses in the

neighbourhood. There is some terrible reason for it which I do not perfectly comprehend. And, oh—they say I am going to have a baby, but I do not believe I shall live to have it. I shall die—if you do not come to help me—that is the only way of finishing it.”

She shed tears over herself before she had finished these lines—*she*—who used to be so like a lark—to be confined to one house—a house so dismal that it made her feel as if she had entered a vault from which the sunlight was excluded! And she added in a postscript,

“Paul calls in a doctor to me, who tells me that I have hallucinations—because I try to find out about his wicked deeds. The doctor says that my perceptions are false, and I believe the stupid old man actually thinks so. He talks about my nervous symptoms—in a dry and sinister voice which is enough to grate on anyone’s nerves. To make things worse, he has ordered my room to be heated with flues,

which makes it feel as if it were a hot-house, and orders the maid, whom I detest, to amuse me, when I want to get rid of her."

Precautions were taken to prevent this letter from reaching its destination, and before the evening the writer's mind was straying to other associations.

"I am frightened," she whispered as usual when the hour came for her to retire to rest. "Keep the candles lighted," and then she added with a shudder, gazing earnestly before her. "Stay with me for a little while. There are those noises again, and there is a dreadful face looking at me from the other side of the room."

"Don't you see it is your own face in the looking-glass?" answered Pauline.

"Myself! oh—I forgot," with a sigh; "how altered I am!"

"Lie down, and keep still—you're wandering," said the woman, with rough

kindness, as she settled the pillows, and administered the opiate which the invalid had taken on former occasions.

Paul looked in at his wife a few hours afterwards, and saw that the opium had done its work. She slept like a child worn out with fatigue. The little net which served her instead of a cap had fallen from her hair, and one of her arms was outstretched. And he saw the alteration which she had seen herself. Saw it, much moved, as he examined the outlines of her face, from the narrow, well-shaped forehead, like that of a Greek statue, but not indicating any high development of intellect—to the cheek which had lately lost its glory of vivid colouring, but which was still pure and velvety, and the supple hands indicative of weakness and gentleness, but not by any means the hands of a capable woman. He noted all these things with a look of involuntary tenderness, and then kissed her sad, pale face—kissed it in her sleep.

He did not give her credit for any philosophical resignation, yet he hoped that time might do its work, and sooner or later she would prove subservient to his will.

“She will sleep for hours now,” he thought, as he left her, having no suspicion that these anæsthetics from their constant repetition were beginning to lose their power with her, and that she might escape from their influence.

Before morning she awoke, and sitting upon her bed erect and rigid as a statue, gazed at the rods of sunlight which were striping the carpet through the Venetian-shuttered window. Then the painful impressions of the previous evening returned again to her memory, and she did not try to struggle against them with any meritorious courage. Yet an instinct of self-defence kept her from screaming.

“I am frightened,” she repeated in a

weary refrain to herself. "I cannot stay here—I am completely in my husband's power, and even the doctor is against me. There must be collusion between them, or they would never call me mad."

She waited for a moment, and then continued to herself, pushing back the hair from her forehead.

"Supposing he should attack me. There may be poison—I have heard of such things, especially in foreign countries—or he may stab me in my sleep. He may throw vitriol in my face!"

This last reflection was all-convincing—for vitriol was her horror. She believed that a man who hated a woman might possibly make use of it—especially if he was jealous—to destroy her beauty. She had read of this device in one of her French romances, and the recollection of it now made her start to her feet.

"Why do I stay here?" she thought, "to expose myself to sufferings which

are inevitable and useless—why not try to escape from them ?”

Nothing in the world irritated her like constraint, and from the moment that she knew she was a prisoner in the house, there seemed to her but one remedy. She thought of the farmer in the neighbourhood who so hated Paul de Lafarges that he would willingly do him an injury, and reflected that this man would help her if she could only make a sign to him.

After this resolution was once taken, she became a little calmer. Her fate, it seemed to her for the first time, would soon be in her own hands, and it was only needful for her meanwhile thoroughly to mature her plans. She would get out of the house while Pauline slept, which would probably be at night. She would bribe one of the men, and obtain possession of the key of the great door, and then she would run away under cover of the darkness. If she could reach



the main-road, she could hail the first carriage that came to her to take her to the railway station. If not, she could creep to the house of Paul's enemy.

Did they suspect her purpose?" she sometimes asked herself in anxiety, for her jewels were under lock and key, and she had not lately been supplied with any large amount of ready money. Well, even if her money ran short and the journey to England proved a difficult one—it was not possible that one so young, so good-looking, and so unfortunate as herself should be refused credit. So argued poor Rosette in her utter ignorance of life, but her little arguments and her ray of hope preserved her spirits just sufficiently to keep her from death.

## Book IV.

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### CHAPTER I.

RANDAL STANTON uttered an ejaculation of discontent on the morning of Rosette's disappearance, when he came down and missed his visitor.

De Lafarges' proceedings had been altogether anomalous lately. More than once he had wished that he had never asked him to Caerwyn, more than once he had regretted that he had placed himself in his power.

"Night-walking seems to amuse him," he yawned to himself. "I hear he was

wandering out of doors instead of being in his bed, as early as three o'clock this morning. One would think he was a ghoul or a vampire—he looks like it sometimes with those glittering black eyes of his and that bloodless complexion. I don't like these uncanny excursions. Why—only the other morning I heard him mounting the stairs when every other rational mortal but myself was asleep."

Randal was unusually restless, taking up his knife and fork as if he were about to eat, and then laying them down again on the table, and rising to look out of the window.

"I don't want it now," he muttered, throwing himself into an arm-chair. "I'll wait for a little while. I don't know how it is but I am not hungry."

He suspected something, for his countenance changed when a servant came in bringing him a letter in Paul's handwriting, and lingering as if he noticed that his master had not touched his breakfast.

"Never mind," said Randal with unnecessary sharpness; "leave me alone. I don't want to be troubled by anybody—I wish to have the place to myself without being interrupted—d'ye hear?"

He opened the envelope slowly, methodically. It contained a laconic note from De Lafarges, but enclosed other letters in Rosette's handwriting.

The laconic note ran thus ;

"Do you remember the £1000 or more which you were good enough to offer to pay me? I don't want to remind you of the honorarium due to me or of the written agreement between us, which was supposed to cancel it, for I have taken the debt out in the gilded hair of your betrothed. She threw you over for me. I send you the proof of it. When you read her letters, you may think yourself happy to be free of her. Don't disturb yourself about her. I shall marry her. And there are always these sorts of accidents in life. If I were a theologian, I might

perhaps reflect that the Evil One invented them to vary the monotony of existence. I like a little adventure—for the matter of that I always did, and I remember the time when *you* used to like one too."

Randal pondered over this composition, read the enclosed letters, and then threw his arms up with an air of stupefaction. Was he sorry? He hardly knew. Of course he was angry and indignant at the fact that he had been outwitted. And outwitted in such a clever fashion too, that his quondam friend had not left him a loophole for complaint. Of one thing he was certain, that he must leave the place. How fatally blind, how wildly insane he had been, missing the pearls at his feet, and crunching them under his heels, whilst he went in search of the pinch-beck and paste.

For he awoke to the fact now that Rosette had never really loved him. It was never really an engagement by which she had bound herself to him, or, at least,

she had no idea of a *bona fide* engagement.

She had only cared for him he said to himself in the mongrel language he had often talked with De Lafarges, "*faute de mieux*, and waited till a more tempting *parti* should turn up." And after all, he thought, what was his loss? A girl who was ignorant and capricious, and who had no depth of heart about her; whose complexion was pretty, and who had plenty of hair—like most girls—but who had already caused him blank dismay at the idea of being yoked to her car for life. He could not affect a proud superiority at the thought of her baseness, her changeableness, when he reflected that he had been guilty of a like changeableness himself; but he was very indignant at the treason of De Lafarges.

"As to the girl," he thought, in the same spirit of fine philosophical reflection which made the fox decry the grapes which proved to be beyond its reach,

“As to the girl, the charm is broken. I look upon her as a deception, and can easily forget her. But she need not have played me this trick all the same. I could have been a very good friend to her, when she became the wife of another man.”

Lately, in the solitude of his life at Llandyffryn, Randal had contracted a philosophical, but not practical spirit of introspection. And in the light of this new philosophy, he tried to look at the whole story as he set himself down to his neglected meal later in the morning. If they had told him yesterday, he reflected, that such a thing would happen to him, he would have been in a perfect paroxysm of grief; but now that the episode was over, he was comparatively calm. What was after all the most astonishing to him was the sense of satisfaction, which must have resulted from a secret desire to be rid of the pretty Frankenstein which he had

feared he could never flee from as long as he lived ; a desire which had been hidden from his own observation in some unfathomed part of his own nature. Surely confidence must all the time have been wanting to his love ? His thoughts, goaded by this suspicion, hurried on without cessation.

“ If anyone,” he thought, “ could put into the cruse of the alchemist the why and the wherefore of these sudden hallucinations he would find very little sterling gold after a careful analysis. Curiosity, *ennui*, vanity, dissatisfaction with the ordinary routine of life, and the love of imitation, all tempt men into these senseless fancies about women. But I—who thought that I loved Rosette—I, who have endured at times since I became acquainted with her, irritation, almost anger, and the embarrassment of a false situation, *I* had not even the excuse of dissatisfaction or dulness. It was an infatuation, which tempted me from some-



thing which was infinitely better, and it might have been a fatal one. If there were an empty place in my heart after a fancy of this sort, I don't think it would prove very difficult to fill. But there was *not* an empty place, either before or after—that is the absurdity of the whole thing.”

He could analyse in this way, but his eyes were not yet opened to discern how his whole life had been warped and twisted by his own weak nature. He saw the past as we often see it, under a halo which hid its scars, the delusive prism of memory making his own conduct appear tolerable to him.

“I must leave Llandyffryn for a time,” he thought, “but after an interval Maitland will forgive. Hers is not a nature to bear malice; I can tell her how my heart never *really* wandered from its allegiance to herself, and she shall be spared the pain and humiliation of a woman whom a man has once known and seemed to neglect.”

In his selfishness he never thought of the fate of Rosette. *His* respectability was saved, and he did not think it necessary to act the part of a good Samaritan. Whether the foolish girl was unconsciously rushing to ruin or not was a matter which did not much concern him. He recollected that De Lafarges was, as he had always told him, a perfect Mephistopheles with regard to women, and then ended by shrugging his shoulders, and thanking Heaven that "the poor thing was no relation of *his*."

## CHAPTER II.

THE Spring was returning again to Llandyffryn, with days of sweet delusive promise which seemed to be borrowed from the approaching Summer. The saps were stirring and life fermenting in the vegetable world, and—though the crinkled buds were afraid as yet to face the outer air—the gigantic efforts for which no philosopher can account, when the annual miracle is completed by complex machinery which baffles him, were going on unheeded in the trackless heaths and lone meadows accompanied by the twittering of merry-hearted birds. The distant murmur of a beck could be heard as it gurgled and

rippled over stones : the air was perfumed with the odour of primroses, and with a sweetness as of a breath of violets, which stole through Maitland's senses cheering and satisfying her as she plodded through one of the lanes near the cottage. She was glad that the Summer was coming again with its hum of insects, its beautiful gauzy flies, and its white clouds sleeping on the mountain sides. The Winter, as she always confessed to herself, was not pleasant at Llandyffryn, and this Winter had for many reasons been drearier than usual. For though Maitland had learnt in it some of the sweet and sad secrets which are only to be learnt in solitude and sorrow, and though she had at last reached the still waters which are only to be reached after passing through many storms, still she was glad that the days of that Winter—when there had been neither sun nor stars for many days appearing—were experiences which she was not likely to be called upon again to pass through. She

bore the impress of those solitary and anxious days. For though the early fire and tenderness had not left her face, yet the gravity of her aspect had increased. She felt as if already she had reached a quiet steadfast middle age, with nothing to fear for, nothing to hope for—a middle age of which youth says in its longing for excitement, “let me die rather!”

It was not without doing violence to her nature that she endeavoured to annihilate her eager heart, to supply the vacancy with her intelligence, and to effect a divorce between herself and all that ordinarily agitates the life of a woman.

But she was content in her faith and trust.

“I feel,” she said to herself sometimes, “as if I were on a narrow precipitous pathway, and could only climb just so far. If I could reach the top of the mountain, or take the next step or two, I might have a further look-out and understand it all.”

But though she could not understand, she could wait. And her life, in its premature old maidenhood, seemed to be all mapped for her though she could not see it, and planned by a diviner power than hers.

"If I only knew what would become of you in the future," her father had said to her once during one of the days of that long desolate Winter, when increasing weakness and the failure in his own health had made him think a little more than usual of his eldest daughter. "If I only knew what would become of you and that poor lame boy."

"I don't think it is necessary to talk about the future," Maitland had answered cheerily, turning the conversation to other matters.

All this time they had neither of them been very anxious about Rosette. She had written of the luxuries of her magnificent home in Paris, in that artificial tone which she adopted in writing, and which

had been taught to her at her boarding-school. Mr. Gathorne had ceased to declare that "De Lafarges was a scheming villain," and had been put upon his mettle concerning his daughter's marriage; whilst Maitland, who acknowledged in her secret heart that nothing much more wretched could have happened to her sister, tried to be thankful that things had turned out as well as they had at present.


And when Randal Stanton disappeared from Llandyffryn, though Maitland Gathorne had been sorry for him, she had not thought much about him, even when the dull days dragged heavily past.

"He will easily find somebody else to suit him," she had said, when other cares pressed more heavily on her.

And so, when a little later on in that Springtime, the same Springtime when Rosette was wearing her heart out in the banishment of Normandy, Randal returned

to Llandyffryn with the old glow in his heart, thinking that the old links could be gathered up again; though Maitland saw him when he passed, and wondered at him because his step was so elastic, and because his brow had so easily cleared, it never occurred to her that he would worry her with useless expressions of regret. The barrier between them—which, with his recuperative power, seemed to be only a slight one, and capable of removal, was to her no fancy, but a tangible reality.

Randal had spent a few days at Llandyffryn before he attempted to renew his acquaintance with Maitland Gathorne. Days of unusual beauty, for the Spring was now farther advanced. The gorse was in its full beauty, and every week increased the hedgerow glories of the lanes. But Randal was too restless to give much attention to the immaculate purity of the unclouded sky, or to the sea at Barfordd, which was now like an





emerald, now like jasper, or like chryso-prase, according to its varying beauties. He walked a good deal, dipping into the troughs of the valleys, and climbing again to the heathery hills. Walked more with the hope of meeting his old love, and trusting to auspicious chance for some hope of renewing his former relations with her, than with any idea of admiring the scenery. For there seemed to be a vacuum in his life; hours which he could not occupy, and in which he found himself always wandering in the direction of Maitland's cottage, as if he would resume by instinct the old habits; hours which grew so long that he could not endure the weight of them.

"I can never rise to her height. The heart has its natural inclinations," he thought to himself, with a sarcastic smile at his own expense sometimes; "and like the stream which flows down the hill, it follows them quickly enough from above to below, but query,

whether it can rise from below to above?"

Those were the times when Maitland seemed to be so much nobler and better than himself, that for a few moments he would be overwhelmed with despondency. But then again he would remind himself how poor she was, and how with the constant pressure of the cares entailed by her poverty, it was not likely she would refuse the chance of a prosperous marriage. It was true enough that though the girl practised every little economy, and though her industry was unceasing, yet her difficulties had increased, and the mysterious ties, which are known as the "two ends," could by no means be made to meet.

There was a leakage always going on which could never be soldered up. For when she had made a list of her father's unpaid bills, and had already put aside the money for these debts, he would apply to her for a further sum without explain-

ing the object to which this sum was to be appropriated.

"Something is going wrong, hopelessly wrong, and I do not understand it," Maitland had said to herself on one of these bright May mornings when Mr. Gathorne had asked her to give him twenty pounds. "I wonder how many more skeins I am to unravel; there have been skeins enough in my life," she added with a sigh.

It was not like her to lament the untowardness of her fate. Yet even the quiet perseverance of her hopeful nature could, after experiences like these, be damped. And Randal meeting her that day saw the signs of recent weeping on her face, and knew that she had been tried beyond her strength. It was in just such a mood that he had wished to meet her, and he thought that the fates had favoured him at last as he stopped for the first time to shake hands with her. She looked a little sorry to see him; but there was no help

for it. She gave him a hand which felt limp in his eager grasp, and then relenting a little, with a feeling that she had been over-stiff, and that if the meeting were somewhat awkward, this man had been wronged by her sister, she forced a smile and said to him with a faltering voice,

“Forgive her.”

He had so nearly forgotten Rosette that he did not at first understand the meaning of her allusion. Then he remembered how this noble little woman had always forgotten herself when she was thinking of others, and the idea spurred him on to vehemence, so that he answered her.

“You would forgive *me* if you understood me a little better.”

Her face, which had been red with blushes before, became suddenly pale. A new feeling of shame stung her. But the common-sense which had always been one of her strongest characteristics, did not

desert her in the emergency. And though her cheek quivered, she laughed and said, "I am not good at riddle guessing."

There was a touch of reproof in her voice, but he was not to be so put off by her.

"Maitland, forgive."

"I did not think there was anything to forgive," she answered cheerily; "but if there is, I forgave it long ago."

He looked at her attentively, but she did not lift her eyes to his. The attempt at cheerfulness was costing her very dearly.

"Do you remember," he asked, "how you used to enforce upon me the commanding principle, that a man's life ought to be composed in all its parts, and not distracted by a mixture of aims? Do you remember how you used to laugh at me for fancying I belonged to the Brahmin caste, and refusing to associate with the poor people here, as if they were my in-

feriors? Maitland, if you will teach me now, I will sit at your feet. I will be a model landlord to my tenants; and you shall help me with my poor—help me, if I can, to retrieve the past. It was as you used to tell me. My pride has had a fall—my weakness made a fool of me. But, Maitland, let us both forget the spilt water. We are young—life is before us, and my weakness is at an end.”

“I will trust so,” she said still smiling, but looking at him with compassionate eyes which seemed to shine at him across a great gulf; “but don’t you see that your reasoning has a double edge? A man who has done with weakness does not speak in exaggerated language of sitting at the feet of a friend of the other sex. I am still willing to be your friend. I am willing to accept your fidelity in that sense. And,” she continued, with something of her old enthusiasm, “you will give me the greatest proof of that fidelity in working to become

an earnest Godfearing *man* in the highest and largest acceptation of the word."

"Your friend!" he retorted a little bitterly. "Most women prefer a little love to all the expressions of esteem in the world."

She was silent, looking at the distant sea, and at the clouds passing over the mountain; *she*, remembering the past, could have answered bitterly in her turn.

"Such a love is like that floating cloud—brought by the wind—driven away by the wind; or it is like a cupful of water brought to fill that vaster ocean."

But the natural sweetness of her disposition prevailed and she restrained herself, though her face betrayed the inward struggle.

He was looking at her anxiously, and could not control the triumphant cry.

"Your face is changed. Your voice trembles—you try to hide it, but—but I believe—you still love me a little."

She shook her head. Her emotions had so bewildered her that they seemed to have swamped thought. Yet she *felt* without reasoning—felt how far they had drifted apart, and how difficult it was to argue with him. And her kindness of heart made her answer.

“You mistake; but I told you I still think of you in a certain sense. I offer you my friendship; I can offer you nothing else.”

“That is enough for the present, but one day you will belong to me,” he said, as he wrung her hand and left her.

She still shook her head, and moved away from him, her eyes sad, and her face pensive. But for that day he was satisfied; he thought he had made a good beginning.



## CHAPTER III.

**M**AITLAND did not sleep well that night.

But the next day she resumed her usual occupations with the tranquil serenity of yesterday. The only perceptible difference which she showed, was in confining her walks to certain hours in the day, and to a short distance from the Cottage. She succeeded in her object of avoiding another meeting with Randal Stanton, though at the conclusion of a week he could bear it no longer, but made a sudden resolution to call upon her at the Cottage. He found Maitland alone—Mr.

Gathorne being confined, as he had often been lately, by indisposition, to his own apartment. The sitting-room looked much as it had looked when he first saw it. There was the same neatness and propriety, the same artistic perception of fitness, and the same clever little devices for making poverty look pretty. Maitland was sitting at the table, pen in hand, and apparently absorbed in a letter of some importance.

"Am I intruding?" he asked, as he saw her look was absent, and that she held the letter in one hand while she welcomed him with the other.

"No," she said, with the radiant smile which reminded him of former years, "I am always happy to see my friends. But I have just a few words to write, it is important for me to catch this post, and if you will sit down and make yourself comfortable, I shall soon have written them."

He did not sit down, but feeling a little

abashed, he began to walk about the room, and examine the books in the bookcases. It was so different from the greeting which he had fondly anticipated.

She read the letter with great attention, and then began to write slowly. After a few minutes he spoke to her softly, but she did not hear. She did not hear even when for a moment she ceased to write, her pen balanced in her hand, and her elbows resting on the arms of the old armchair in which she was sitting in the attitude of reverie. He was irritated by her evident forgetfulness of his presence, and began to pace up and down the room, hoping to attract her attention.

"To whom are you writing?" he asked her, abruptly.

"My publisher," she said, without looking up.

"Your publisher!" he repeated, scornfully. "What infatuation it is! To ex-

pect to support yourself by writing in an age like this! To engage in eager competition with men, letting them elbow you and jostle you, and then to hope to get the cream for both states, the reverence which is paid to womanhood, and the remuneration which is given to the stronger sex. You know I cannot endure it. I cannot bear to think of it."

She did not answer, but went on quietly with her letter. Could it be possible that she did not think him worth answering?

He resumed his quarter-deck patrolling, and then asked her again.

"Do you ever make more than enough to support you from week to week?"

"No," she answered, flushing a little at the freedom of the question.

"And you work hard for that, so hard that it is telling upon you," he said, stopping in his walk, and eyeing her compassionately.

She had aged, there could be no doubt of it; but the increased nobility of the face, the grandeur gained by unselfish grief had hallowed it and purified it.

"Do you ever think of to-morrow?" he asked, resuming his catechising.

"As little as I can. Our Master taught us to learn from the fowls of the air who sow not, neither do they gather into barns," she answered, for fear he should misunderstand her, raising her sweet, long-suffering face.

"So you expect nothing from the future?"

"I expect nothing from it; I have learnt that it is better not to raise my expectations."

"You have unusual talents," he continued, almost vexed that she took him so literally. He knew that she was already too apt to undervalue herself.

"My talents do not do me much good.

It is hard work, as you say, writing for your living; and I know none of the reviewers."

He uttered a passionate exclamation, as for the first time it occurred to him how a number of sarcastic strangers might have the power of misconstruing the thoughts of the woman he loved, of attributing wrong meanings to them, or of picking out isolated sentences, or possibly printer's errors, to turn her ideas into unmerited ridicule.

"Gently," she said, looking up at him with a half-smile. "If you are to be my friend, you musn't use strong language. I pride myself on being educable, and I look upon reviewing as one means of education."

"You must give it all up," he said, forgetting his former moderation. "Promise me you will. I have plenty for both of us, there is no earthly reason why we should not marry at once. As my wife, every taste you have should be satisfied

instantly, every want should be anticipated. Why this obstinate resolution—this unfortunate desperation?”

“You mistake,” she repeated, looking at him quietly and sorrowfully. “I am not obstinate about anything, and it is *you* who seem to be desperate. I have told you I shall most likely never marry. I have no ambitions, no desires. I am content as I am, and only ask to remain free.”

“What has made you so hard?” he asked; “the other day you were affected, you were not like a block of marble, and I hoped that you loved me still.”

“If I was moved,” she said, thinking it better that he should hear the plain truth, “it was at the thought of an extinct illusion. Yes, I loved once as a dreamer, as a sentimentalist, as a mad-woman, if you *will* hear it, an ideal being who had your outward appearance, but,” she added slowly, “it was not *you*. For a short

time I entered into love and enthusiasm, but in order to keep up that devotion, the object of it must have been noble and worthy of my respect. I had read of such a man in books, and thought that I had found him; but when I discovered that I had been deceived, I could no longer love. Had I been married to you when I made that discovery, I might have continued to cherish you in my heart, but, as a lover, you were nothing more to me when my ideal fled."

"You are not a woman—you are like a man," he said, "to talk in that way—you do not feel—you reason—you have no heart."

"I *have* a heart," she said, looking at him with the steady look which had disconcerted him so much during her last speech; "I have a heart, but you do not understand it. I do not place all my hopes of happiness in that perishable emotion which some people call 'love.' I thank Heaven that there are more kinds



of love than one, and all love should be in obedience to unalterable and supreme law. Love—the love of which you dream—is not the end of life. A man ought not to consecrate his whole being to it. The heart is all the warmer if everything is not sacrificed to its sudden caprices. Is not, for instance, the brain which conceives and creates—the brain by which men approach the image of the Creator—to be also remembered? Is not the intelligence something? Can earthly love affect in one way or another the grand hereafter which awaits us? Let us talk of something else—of new plans about your tenants—your work for the future—your estate. If you can forget the past and consult me as your friend, I shall always be glad to see you, as I said before.”

He was quite calm, but deadly white, as he said.

“Don’t talk about my estate—I shall never see it again.”

At that moment it seemed to him as if

nothing on earth availed him any more, and as if Heaven were closed to him through his own mistakes.

Maitland's quiet tone and steady look had convinced him as nothing else could possibly have convinced him.

The time might come when he might be thankful to her for the offer of her friendship, when she might no longer seem to him like a girl to be courted, but like a friend of his own age; courageous, self-denying, inflexible in points of honour, and capable of sublime sentiment, though it was not exactly the sort of sentiment he had desired. But that time was not yet. As yet he could not recover from the wound to his self-esteem, and from the inevitable and galling conclusion that she must have despised him for much that had happened in the past, though she had always hidden her scorn from him. The very sky seemed to laugh at his shame and mortification, as he went out from his abortive interview with the woman he had once

slighted. The character of the day seemed to have changed. A chilling east wind had sprung up, and the air seemed to bite a little. The blast was swirling the sleet seawards, and the cottages looked squalid.

“I shall leave this place to-morrow,” he said as he wrapped his coat closer round him, and hurried back to Caerwyn.

## CHAPTER IV.

IT was an afternoon in August, and the air was close and still. But Maitland and Steenie were both oblivious of anything unpleasant in the day. For the boy—who had had a “secret” for some months past of which he had been immeasurably proud, and who had been humoured by his sister in his desire to be left alone for the prosecution of the “secret” during certain hours in the morning—had that afternoon taken Maitland gleefully to his bedroom, and poured out ten golden sovereigns which he had earned during those spare hours by learn-

ing her craft in imitating point lace—some of the designs for which he had himself invented.

“I am so glad I can do it so well. I was some time in teaching myself—but I didn’t want to ask you to help me, you know—it would have spoilt the secret,” he said, lifting a glowing face, and clearly forgetting his own troubles in the interest which he took in earning this money.

He held up his little purse with an air of triumph.

“You must have worked very hard, dear,” said Maitland, stroking the brown curly hair, and looking with pleasure at the kindling face. “It was very self-denying and good of you.”

“Oh, don’t pity me!” said the boy, “the work has done me good. I’ve quite left off feeling bad in my mind as I felt some time ago. You can’t think how glad I am to be of use.”


“It will be of use, great use; you must go on and make some more,” answered

Maitland, perceiving that this occupation might supply the necessary interest which had been wanting in the boy's life. "And did you invent these patterns yourself? It was very clever of you," she said as he began to exhibit a large collection of designs for lace, greatly to his sister's astonishment.

"And aren't they pretty? I am so glad you like them. I did not know I could draw nearly so well till I tried. I got the wild flowers from the woods, you know, one of the boys in the village brought them to me, and that helped me with the patterns; oh, it was jolly to do them!"

"You like keeping a secret, Steenie, can you be *my* secret-keeper?"

"To think I can be your helper and your secret-keeper too!" said the child with a laugh; his eyes brightening and glistening as if a "beam of light had been shot into his heart."



“Yes, dear, it is only sick children who are trusted with secrets. If you were strong and well now, I should never think of trusting you. But you know those letters from the publisher that I was so anxious about? Well, I had fifty pounds on the publication of my book, and I was to have fifty more if it sold so many hundred copies. And the critics have been good to me; they have praised my book, and it has sold better than I expected, so that I have heard this very morning I am to have the whole hundred. Quite a mine of wealth, isn't it?” said Maitland, as Steenie clapped his hands. “But I mean to make a separate fund of it, specially for your benefit. You shall be an artist after all, if I can add to the fund by degrees, and soon you can begin to take lessons, what do you think of that?”

“Do you think I have really a talent? just that one talent?” asked the boy, with the tears glistening on his eyelashes at

this hope of realising his fondest wishes. "Oh, I am afraid it was very bad of me to feel it so hard to be still and useless. But if I could only paint pictures. Oh, Maitland, it is so good of you. Do you think I can have a studio fitted up for me to paint in it? and can I make models of the village-people, and go to London by and by, and perhaps paint for the Royal Academy?" he continued, breathlessly. Then his face suddenly clouding over, he added in a dull aside, "But, perhaps, papa will take the money, you haven't thought of that."

For the secret that his father could devour money in some incomprehensible fashion, like a mysterious ogre, was already no secret to the observant child.

"Oh, I shall have enough for him besides," said Maitland, passing over the question. "You know I already have a little salary for teaching Mr. Moorcroft's children." And her face softened and



brightened as she thought of James Moorcroft's kindness to her, and how her book could never have succeeded if she had not profited by his advice. For on account of the out-of-the-world existence which she had led in Wales, she was ignorant of many of those details of business of which it is no shame for the cleverest women to be ignorant. "Mr. Moorcroft has been very good to me," she murmured, with that softness in her face. "It is wonderful how much kindness I meet with in the world."

"And *I* think it would be funny if they could help being kind to you, you are always so kind to other people," protested Steenie, as brother and sister clung together in one of their fondest embraces.

It was a dark afternoon, as if thunder were coming on, and before Stephen went to bed there was a slight storm, accompanied by heavy rain. The storm was

not of long duration, and when it cleared the evening was more than usually fine. The heavy cumulus clouds had gone, but soft streaks remained, ribbed like the sea sands. The distant sea was of a deep sapphire blue, with tints of rose and saffron near the horizon. Herons were standing near the river, and all the colouring was intense, and unutterably beautiful. Maitland, half engrossed with her work, looked up continually to watch the changing effects till the first stars began to glimmer. Then she drew down her blind, and prepared to undress, for her father often needed her early in the morning. He slept at this hour, and she had no more reason to stay up. Just as she lit her candle, and fastened the house-door, she heard a tapping at one of the windows, and then the sound of something thrown that had broken the glass. Frightened and astonished, she listened intently and thought she heard confused noises, as of

feeble complaints, and then stifled sighs. What should she do? She was all alone. Should she call for assistance, or search for herself? Then she remembered that there was only a sick old man, and an invalid boy in the cottage, and that both of them were probably by this time asleep; and the idea of robbers and murderers seemed ridiculous at Llandyffryn.

She opened the door gently, and stole out into the twilight. The panting sighs had ceased. But close to the window of which the glass had doubtless been broken after ineffectual efforts to attract attention, was the form of a woman who had fainted. The poor creature's silk dress, which was handsomely trimmed, and her bonnet which was made of lace and feathers, had been drenched with the rain, whilst her hair, which was streaming down her shoulders, was also dripping with water. Maitland turned sick with fear as she noticed the colour of the hair,

and the ghastly contrast between the present wretchedness, and the spoilt magnificence of the dress. She ran to the woman and raised her up with the unnatural strength of excitement. And then, in the indistinct light, she saw enough of the face which was scratched and bruised, with its cheek-bones prominent, and its lips parched, to recognise her own sister.

But there was a half-insensibility about poor Rosette, even when by strenuous efforts she was recovered from her fainting fit, which seemed to make her insensible to the touch of her sister.

"Is it a dream?" she murmured, looking as if she did not understand, when she staggered to her feet. "My money has all gone—can you lend me any money? I have only a few more miles to reach home. Can you lend me any money?"

Then Maitland understood, though she

did not hear till long afterwards, that poor Rosette had repeated this pitiful request more than once during the last few miles which she had walked to Llandyffryn—and that in her fatigue and shame she had taken short cuts through the thick woods, tearing her face with the boughs of trees—anything to reach her destination. She had no watch on and no rings; she had evidently parted with these things.

“Is it a dream?” she repeated, as Maitland with soothing caresses managed to lead her into the cottage. “Where am I? I do not understand. Don’t tell anybody I am here.”

“You are in your old home,” said her sister lovingly. “Nobody else knows you are here. I heard you groan, and you must have fallen. You look very ill, dear. What shall I do? Shall I go for assistance? But I dare not leave you.”

“No don’t call;” she said; “don’t

leave me. Help me—stay with me.”

There was blood upon her arm, caused by the broken glass of the window. Maitland bathed the blood from the wound, and bound it up with soft handkerchiefs. Still Rosette did not speak, and did not seem to understand questions.

“He will follow me—even here I may be in danger,”—she shivered.

Who did she mean by the allusive “he?” It was of no use for Maitland to ask her.

She tried to get her into her own bed, but for some time it was useless.

Rosette refused to move. The one idea which seemed to remain to her was that of asserting her own right to independent action. And so she remained during that night on the old sofa to which her sister had first assisted her—her head pressed against the cushion with immobility of death, whilst an occasional movement of

the shoulders and a quivering of the lips were the only signs she gave that she was living. The following morning she remained much in the same condition—her hands lying listlessly on her lap—and her eyes so expressionless that they seemed to have lost their colour.

“Oh, if I had but a little child!” was the only exclamation she made with the sudden vehemence of passion, once during the lonely hours of the night. “Shall I ever live to have it born, I wonder?”

But when Maitland asked her if it were possible to communicate with her husband, she only answered with the shuddering sound in her breath.

“No; he thinks that I am mad. There is no hope for me there—there is a conspiracy against me—I will never write to him again.”

Certainly she gave the impression that the balance of her mind was shaken, and Maitland trembled for many reasons to let

her father hear of her sad coming on the following day.

For Madame De Lafarges was terribly altered from the Rosette who had been his pride and delight in past times. She had lost the brightness of her complexion, the vivacity of her movements—and the continual changes of expression which had constituted her fascination in those past times. When he was brought to her, she was lying as pale as death, with her eyes closed, on the sofa. There was more of fatigue than of grief in her whole appearance, and this was precisely the condition of her mind. Indifference and lassitude had succeeded to her excitement. Her father approached her and repeated her name softly. But she did not answer him. She only looked at her sister with an air of astonishment, as if her memory had lost all consciousness of the past.

“What do you want?” she said, turning her head away fretfully at last.



As long as this state of stupefaction continued, it was difficult to find any mementoes of the past Rosette. For the broken-hearted woman who had returned to them was not only winsome and frolicsome no longer, but the good tempered vanity had utterly deserted her, which stood her in such stead in her girlish days. She paid no attention to the disordered state of her dress, and refused to look in a glass, being evidently afraid of the reflection of the blanched face which showed the height of her despair.

The worst sign was a feeble smile which played more than once on her pale lips at the sight of a big doll which she nursed like a baby; and the best sign was the fact that on one occasion when Maitland had persuaded her to sit in the garden with the hope that the air might revive her, she broke out into sudden sobbing, with deep drawn sobs. Yes, indeed she was crying and it was worse

than tears—with convulsive sobs which seemed to rend her in pieces.

Maitland was deeply moved by the pathos and the pity of it. Yet she nerved herself to follow the advice of the doctor whom they had called in to see the invalid, by taking the opportunity of questioning her a little about the circumstances of her flight. Rosette heard her stupidly—but she began to understand. And her face had a hunted look in it, as pushing back her hair with a wandering dreamy expression, she talked about the domestic dissensions which it seemed to Maitland must have been so bitter as to cause public scandal. From this time, she began to talk a little more of them day after day, and her friends gathered by degrees that her original idea had been to present herself at her father's house, to claim protection from the husband with whom she averred she could no longer live.

But when she began to talk about the lake, and the probable murder, Maitland

reasoned with her, asking with an attempted smile,

“Who has been pouring such poison into your ears? However bad your husband may be, I will not believe he is so bad as that. Let me write to him and investigate it; we may at least give him an opportunity of clearing himself.”

Then the weakness of mind seemed to return, and Rosette shivered and muttered:

“No—no, you must not write to him. I can never live with him again. If I did, it would only come to a miserable end.”

“How do you mean, dear? You cannot leave your husband without sufficient reason—and you cannot prevent him from following you if he attempts, as he is almost sure, to do so. However bad he may be—he is still your husband. The law will not help you in a case like this.”

Then Rosette gave a cry of anguish.

Terror seemed to freeze her, and she shivered and moaned like a child. It seemed to her there would be no hope for her in life if her husband were to track her.

"I shall die," she said; "if he comes here; you must save me from him."

She had been like a player before the fatal green table at which she had ventured all her gold—thinking herself ruined, and yet venturing the last penny with trembling expectation, as a hope of happiness. If this last hope was to be lost for her, and she had to go back to her husband, Maitland feared that her reason might be utterly destroyed.

## CHAPTER V.

THE woman Pauline, who had been placed as sick nurse in charge of Rosette, was terrified when she found that the lady had disappeared.

“What—what’s that you are saying?” De Lafarges asked when first she tried to tell him; towering above her in his full height, and making her so terrified as scarcely to be able to speak. His habitual self-control had been completely shaken. But he gave himself time to hide his emotion by making her repeat her words,

and appearing as if he did not credit them.

"Would you be so good as to repeat that again?" he said very slowly; "I don't think I heard it quite clearly."

She repeated it, trying to inflame his jealousy by hinting that her mistress must have had unknown causes for her flight, and he did not attempt to say anything in extenuation of his wife. He did not believe in Rosette any more; he had ceased again to believe in man or woman; but he felt for the moment as if he would like to kill her. His one idea was to follow her and bring her back. Though it was late in the evening he ordered his favourite horse, and determined to ride at once to the nearest railway station. He was fond of the animal, but he treated it cruelly, attacking it furiously with the spur, and riding it as if he did not know whither he went. It was dark, but the darkness was greater in his own soul. The one thing which he had loved had repaid

him with hate, and he felt as if he could revenge himself on the universe. He had clattered down the hill-sides and forced his way through the woods, but there were miles yet for him to pass before he could reach the railway station.

The poor horse suddenly stood still, and he felt its sides shake. He saw that the spur had torn it, and he was repentant. At that moment the moon shone through the clouds, and he, seeing that he had lost the right way, dismounted, leading the animal by the bridle till he could find the path. The silvery light of the moon was soft and serene to the eyes, bathing the summits of the hills, the oaks and the poplar trees with the indistinct distances. Beyond, the sea was spread out like crystal with a few sails upon it.

What a night it was, reminding him of the possibility of Heaven, while he seemed to carry hell with him in his own soul! He could hardly bear to look at the full-

foliated trees swept over by the wind, or at the ragged clouds which were floating, tipped with silver, close to the calm-looking moon. There was a scent of wild-flowers, carrying him, as the sense of smell carries our minds back to past associations, to the lanes of Llandyffryn with their clematis and wild roses.

He cursed the fate which had taken him to Wales, and which had made him fancy to marry an English girl.

"It is *her* fault," he thought in his savage grief. "Had she had more bone and muscle about her, or had I been able to trust her, together we might have been able to retrieve the past."

No, nothing could ever console him now. His head seemed to be on fire. And when he reached the inn where he found he had to wait for some hours before he took the next train, he could



not even lie down. He slept at last for a short time in his arm-chair, and when he awoke the morning had dawned. But at first he could not recall the circumstances of the past night, and rubbed his forehead with both his hands, as if to restore his failing ideas. Then he looked at his watch, but it had stopped in the violence of his ride. He himself was conscious of being physically fatigued, and his clothes had been torn by hurrying through the forest. As past circumstances returned, one by one, to his memory, his old tenderness for his wife returned, with fresh fears for her safety. He remembered how he had wanted to monopolise her, not caring for her sufferings, and recalled to mind her delicate state of health; her unfitness for roughing it. And for the first time twinges of conscience came to him, with fear of retribution through her death.

Only yesterday he had wished to kill her, but to-day he succumbed to his old

infatuation. He had no doubt that the poor child had returned to her native country, and determined to follow her at once to England.

As he waited at Dieppe, it seemed to him that they were singing the Marseillaise, and that crowds were collected in some of the streets. But he did not stop to listen or to inquire into the meaning of the excitement.

"A very pretty German quarrel!" he heard the captain say, as he stepped into the boat, and he soon heard more from a garrulous compatriot whom he had met in Normandy.

"War!" prattled his informant to a demurring audience. "What an extraordinary thing! who could believe it? War, after the peace exposition, after railroads, the electric telegraph, and the fraternization of nations; war after the universal brotherhood of photography, and when Europe ought to have only one heart beating in unison. It was impious, monstrous, almost idiotic!"

"They will take me for a coward," thought De Lafarges, "if I go away just now when war is declared."

Hitherto he had remained in his selfish imperturbability, believing in his blue blood, and longing for personal importance. But now things had assumed a fresh aspect, and for the first time he was conscious of a longing to engage in scenes of bloodshed and danger.

His brow darkened when the little Frenchman, who talked like a chattering monkey, said,

"So Monsieur was going, as he was, to England. Monsieur took no interest in the declaration of war, and Monsieur was right. If there was a fire or a midnight assassin, sensible men would be ready to show their bravery. But a war of fancy, to gratify the Emperor's vanity, a war of ridiculous pique with Germany. He," the speaker, "did not see why he should have his brains blown out for nothing; it would be fanatical to do as the

Germans did, and offer their services for their country, with the fine standing army that they had in France, it would be affectation, giddiness, absurdity."

One of the audience shook his head, and the Frenchman continued,

"After all, you know, we owe a good deal to the Empire. It has made France take the lead amongst the other nations of the world."

"Are you so sure of that?" asked an Englishman, with a light laugh. "Wait a few years, and the Empire may disappear like the bankruptcy of a bubble company. Other adventurers besides Napoleon have been ruined ere this."

The words rung in Paul's ears, and set him thinking as he paced up and down the deck of the steamer. He remembered that he had thrown away the great lot with which *he* had started in the lottery of life. Nature had favoured him, and it had seemed so much the better for him. But he had turned all her favours into

disasters. He had been his own worst enemy, gambling away his property, and ruining his own health. He had recollections burning like hot irons into his conscience, which he would willingly wipe out by any amount of personal endurance; and he had associations and ties which he should be so glad to cut through, that he would willingly give his life to be perfectly free of them. One age, as he so often said, was so much the repetition of other ages that there was no saying what might be the consequence of this war with Germany. He himself had seen too much behind the scenes, and knew sufficient of the luxury which had enervated the French army to make him rate its prospects of success less highly than others did. But meanwhile he determined to wait.

"I should be a fool," he thought, trying to argue with some of his old philosophy, "a fool to venture my destiny in a quarrel of which I do not approve—and of which I don't by any means see

the issue. When I wish to devote myself, and get rid of my life, I will choose the hour, and know why."

But his cynical philosophy had deserted him for ever. The last vestige of it left him when he reached Wales, not knowing whether his wife was dead or alive. Maitland could no more avoid receiving him than she could avoid facing other things that were unpleasant. He looked more dark and forbidding than usual, and she was a little afraid of him, as he saw by the increasing pallor of her face; and yet when he came to speak to her, the wearied and saddened man seemed scarcely to be the same as the one to whom she had conceived so great an aversion. He had been too proud to ask for any information in the village, and his pride still made him wish to hide from his wife's nearest relations the fact that he was suffering. He tried to pronounce Rosette's name, but he could not manage it, and as he stood

still with his lips working, and trying to master his inward agony, Maitland pitied him, and thought to herself.

“He was wonderfully fond of her in spite of everything.”

And yet she could scarcely call it true fondness; it was an unnatural affection, selfish and unsparing. For when she told him how ill Rosette had been—more ill than ever lately, and how—as with a sense of some crushing, overpowering calamity forcing her to lie down like a broken thing and hide her face—she would keep still for hours, not speaking, or even noticing; and how sometimes when she seemed to be ashamed of being surprised in such a state of utter prostration, she would raise herself, trying mechanically to walk, and then would sink down again, while her limbs shook, and her head seemed to be confused—he only repeated,

“Tell her I am here.”

"Tell her!" repeated Maitland hopelessly, "what can be the use of telling her? she seems to think no more—to know no more—just for the present—she is utterly crushed. It is as if she were recovering from an attack of fever, and must have a long period of sleep. By and by she may be herself, and then you can see her. But now—it would be cruel to her. Why, whenever she wakes, she makes the same complaint of the dull thumping of her heart, and the sudden light dancing before her eyes. Leave her to us for the present—when she is better, you shall see her."

"I do not wish to argue with her," he said doggedly, "but I must see her."

"The doctor has been here," continued Maitland earnestly. "He warns us that she needs care and perfect quietness. If there should be any relapse, he will not answer for the consequences."



“Relapse into what? do you speak of the mind or body?” he asked with a bitterness which Maitland resented. “I suppose you know that the mind is weak, and that we were obliged to take care of her?”

“I spoke of fever,” she said indignantly; “of fever, the consequence of exposure, and—and delirium. She makes accusations in that delirium, and only God knows whether those accusations are true—God and your own conscience. *You* charged her with being mad, and in her weak state of health the idea seems to have fastened upon her—I can scarcely tell how. But there is no need for us to be alarmed. The doctor speaks hopefully, and thinks the delirium will be transient; he does not think the—the intellect—in danger of any permanent alienation,” added the girl slowly, thankful to repeat the medical opinion, and not to be obliged to tell her brother-in-law of the uncanny tendency which poor

Rosette occasionally showed to mental aberration.

Still he insisted on seeing his wife, and they were obliged to gratify him. She was more placid than usual, and was not aware of his presence. But a peculiar expression on her face showed the nature of her illness, and her indifference to everything. There were no more smiles and laughter, and no more wearied sighs. She had never cared for books or work when she was well, and she made no pretence of caring for them now. Her hands were folded idly on her lap, and a light shawl was thrown over her delicate shoulders, as she sat reclining in the old arm-chair, apparently looking out of the window with a melancholy dreaminess in her eyes which seemed only to be gazing at vacancy.

“What are you looking at, dear?” asked Maitland, trying to satisfy the anxious husband by tempting her to speak.

"Oh, there's nothing there," answered Rosette; "but there *was* in Normandy. And my dreams appal me so. I dread sleeping."

Then De Lafarges could no longer be restrained.

"You shall never go back to Normandy again, if you don't like it," he said, taking his wife in his arms, and trying to hold her to his heart.

But he frightened her, and irritated her to no purpose. For she did not know him at first, and only pushed him away from her with gestures of repugnance and terror, but with no sign of recognition in her abstracted gaze. And then by degrees the slow thoughts seemed to make their way through her brain; she stared at him fixedly and earnestly, and said, lifting her winsome eyes with a look which he could not withstand,

"I'm free—I'm free—otherwise I can't feel."

"Is there nobody you feel for, not even for your own husband?" asked Maitland again, in pity for him, lowering her voice and turning her eyes away as she asked the question.

But the word "husband" had the effect of rousing the invalid. She rose when she heard the detested name pronounced, looking again after De Lafarges, who had retreated behind the door, now with a dazed look in her eyes.

"Hush!" she repeated, "I am free, don't mention his name. Who is it he has sent to me to take me prisoner again? Ah!—I know it is a keeper, they said I was *mad*. Don't let them touch me. Love him, no, I despise him, don't oblige me to enter into painful details. And yet, you know," she continued plaintively, "I never cared for a hero of romance—I never expected him to be chivalrous. But his place in Normandy frightened

me, and he frightened me himself. I don't want him—I never wanted him—I am glad he is gone.”

“But would you listen to him if he came to plead for himself, and to tell you that you were deceived in much that you heard of him?”

“It was a tissue of wicked falsehoods,” muttered Paul to himself, looking at her from his hiding-place till his eyes burnt with anguish, and grinding his teeth in his effort to bear it.

“No,” she said, shaking her head, “I have no need to listen to him. My feelings have not changed, they will never change. They are the same to-day as they were yesterday, they will always be the same.” And then with one of her varying caprices, she added in words that branded themselves into his memory to eat deeper and deeper, “I am killed through his neglect. It was too bad of him. *He* may live on when I am gone, he may have years of life before him.

But I—I shall die—I shall never get over that long journey, and that cruel rain.”

“She is wandering,” said Maitland, apologetically. “I told you it was of no use for us to harass her.”

## CHAPTER VI.

DE LAFARGES lingered in the neighbourhood for another fortnight, a fortnight of tremendous transactions in the history of Europe. France had been defeated. Paris was discontented, and the regency of the Empress troubled. Already there were subscriptions of money for the wounded, and the fingers of pitiful women were beginning to roll bandages and pick lint, whilst they read with tearful eyes of the ambulances which were being prepared to start for the frontier.

The heat was terrible in Wales as in France on the afternoon when De Lafarges came to take leave of Maitland. She would have given worlds if she could have escaped from the interview, or refused to soil her fingers with the money which she knew it was right for him to insist on giving her for the maintainance of his wife, and the charges for medical attendance. But if she had to brace her nerves, and pull herself together for the meeting, fearing that the vials of his wrath might be emptied on her head, and dreading the degradation of being exposed to his almost savage ferocity, she was surprised to find him in altogether another mood.

She knew little of the composite character of this man, with its mixture of good and evil, which was so inexplicable to her, and was at a loss how to act when she found herself alone with him, and discovered that his anguish and humiliation had overcome him so completely that



at first he was not even able to speak to her, but tried to hide his face from her by covering it with his hand. For some time he stood still like this with an immobility which was more terrible to her than utter collapse, and in an attitude of dogged despair which made her heart ache for him.

Then he said, rousing himself with a sudden effort,

“You must not believe what my poor wife says of me—she is only repeating, as if by rote, foolish gossip and scandal. In her present state she is only an unreasoning echo.”

“The echo of a fact, perhaps,” said Maitland, trying to speak severely, though in spite of her severity she was sorry for him, and wished to show her sorrow. The man had always been antipathetic to her, and had they been brought together under different circumstances, it would have been impossible for them to conform their habits to each other. Though even

then she recollected that, if there was any meaning in her Christianity, aversions and sympathies had to be put on one side; and as she lifted her eyes to the sallow face, deeply lined with various passions, which had always been so repulsive to her, she remembered how, in imitation of the Shepherd who came to save the stray sheep lost in their own wicked wanderings, she ought to feel for this unhappy wanderer.

“The echo of a fact, perhaps,” she repeated, looking at him steadily.

And then he burst out with sudden passion,

“No—not of a fact. Because some of my truths were sugared over to please her—white lies and nothing worse—uttered simply for her sake; she thought that all I said was nothing else but lies—there she was wrong. That poor fellow who drowned himself was ruined by others. I had very little to do with his ruin. I was staying with him at the time

of the catastrophe, and was sorry enough for it ; but I never knew till I took my wife to live at the place, the absurdity of the suspicions which were entertained against me. They accused me of planning the poor fellow's destruction, and of using false dice ; because some loaded dice which were probably *his*, and which he must have obtained in his desperation, were found in his house after his death. I had no occasion to cheat at cards—the luck was generally on my side—and the poor boy, who had had no practice, was no antagonist for me. He was led on by a set of scoundrels, and the wretch who denounced me to Rosette was the most guilty of the set. Was it not enough to make a man bitter to find his own wife turn against him ? If I understand rightly, she formed a surmise of such a nature that—”

“Don't—don't tell me about it,” interrupted Maitland, excited in her turn ; “I don't wish to have your confidences. Confess to your Maker.”

“I am not going to enter into details, but I ask you to consider. Her own sense of the probable might have kept her from imagining such atrocities. The state of the laws—the people in the neighbourhood—the many who would have been ready to witness against me, could they have proved anything. But they contented themselves with hinting, they did not dare to—”

She interrupted him again, by exclaiming,

“I know what you mean. The suspicion was absurd. But do you think it much more pardonable to have allowed a poor boy to be decoyed into a course of conduct which resulted in his suicide? Taking it for granted, as I am willing to take it, that he died in consequence of his own act, and that the suspicion which my sister entertained did discredit to her understanding—are you in no way responsible for the train of circumstances which resulted in a sudden and terrible

death? There is a difference of course of which the law takes account, but what is that difference in the sight of God?"

He was silent, and she continued more gently, and half apologetically,

"We will not talk of it. Perhaps I was too Pharisaic in some of our past controversies. But I am not so now, though the feelings involved may be just as deep. I remember how Jesus taught to all men, whether they accept or reject Him, the lessons of charity and humility, and I remember that *I* am not your judge. But if you have never been true in past times—it is not too late—be true *now*. Don't gloss over your offences, and there is One who will forgive them."

He was inclined to sneer at the word "forgiveness." Had any one else used it, he might have answered that it belonged to the cabbala of a modern philosophy which he had never pretended to read. But as he looked at the earnest face, so good, pure, and womanly, with the tears

standing in its eyes, the sneer died on his lips, and he contented himself with muttering,

“There are wretches to whom contrition would be of no use—they would only be spurned as dogs for it. My wife hates me, and the only thing that can help me is—death. I shall seek it in the war. France has been defeated, and it is for Frenchmen, wretched as I am, to lay down their lives for her.”

There was just a little of the national bombast, which he was generally careful to avoid, in his speech—and that spice of bombast made her answer, doubtful if he was in earnest.

“You!—you are too desperate—too miserable! And the odds would be terribly against you. You are not a soldier. Let those who have been trained to it do the fighting.”

“And yet while you tell me to call things by their right names, and to acknowledge that I have been a villain,” he said with

his old cynicism; "you would have me leave punishment to the innocent and obscure. Not I—I have prided myself on my ancestry, but when the flag of my father's country is menaced, and when all social positions are effaced in the cry of the common danger, there is only one sentiment which can dominate others—the sentiment of equality."

She was silent, acknowledging in her secret heart that in this strange revulsion of feeling he spoke the truth, and that though he expressed it in language which, owing to his excitement, was still a little more inflated than usual, yet it was not over-stated. His life was certainly not worth more than the lives of those crowds of obscure soldiers whose common blood was just then being shed on the field of battle like water. *They* left behind them widows and orphans, and had worked for the good of their kind. *His* wife had forsaken him, and no single action of his life seemed to have brought happiness to

anybody. His death would only restore to the proper hands his ill-gotten possessions—and he—alas—would only carry into the tomb his worse than incontestable inutility.

She stood silent, and he wrung her hand in token of farewell, saying,

“Take care of Rosette—and when she can understand—tell her—she will soon be free.”

“Let me always have your address—you will write,” she said with the tears still in her eyes.

“As long as it will be of any use,” he answered in the same vein.

“You will not expose yourself to unnecessary danger—that would be wicked and suicidal,” she continued, following him a few steps.

“That depends on what I shall be fit to undertake—there are cases in which death is not so difficult as life.”

He had his hand on the door, but as if he were overmastered by some sud-



den impulse, he turned back and said.

"Tell me—do you believe that whatever a man has done he may be forgiven if he is sorry for it—even if—to use your own phraseology—he seems to have 'sinned' beyond repentance?"

"Yes;" she said, "if he repents."

"You do," he answered musingly; "truly and faithfully. You don't think these things are fables. You think there is a future existence in which a man who has spoilt one life can start fresh for another? And you are not one of those women who become devotees without having an atom of true religion—the sort of devoteeism which would have done as well for a Mahomedan or a Buddhist. *You* have lived your religion all your life. One may read it in you, as you read it in your Bible. And you think that a man who has sinned horribly, shall——"

"If he turn away from his wickedness," she whispered, seeing her advantage, and

using it so as to supplement the words as he halted; "and try to do that which is lawful and right, he shall—for dear Christ's sake—be forgiven his offences. Yes, that is a belief which is inexpressibly dear to me."

"And you do not think it impossible?"

"No; I am sure of it. As sure as I am of my own existence," she added with a glad ring in her voice. "Why should it be impossible?"

"I—I could never understand it."

"Don't try," she said; "act upon it before you try to understand it. Try—if you do not find how it begins with the head—to prove how it goes down into the heart, and comes out in the life. If we could understand all these mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, we should not be finite beings."

## CHAPTER VII.

MAITLAND could never afterwards understand how she passed through this painful period of her life. It was as if she were upborne by some power beyond herself. "Had she any nerves?" she caught herself wondering. For she seemed as if a woman with the ordinary nervous system could not have lived so calmly through the crisis. She experienced at times a curious feeling as if she were groping her way through a dark cavernous passage, and seeing the light stream beyond it. Her father had b

more ill since Rosette's melancholy return to the Cottage. The blow, falling on a constitution long undermined by illness, had a more disastrous effect upon Mr. Gathorne than they had at first anticipated. He had sunk into a state of premature decrepitude, shrunken and bowed as if he were twenty years older than his actual age, with his cheeks hollow, and his hands shaking. He had been a mystery to Maitland before, but he was a greater mystery to her now, from the peculiar way in which he seemed to resent his favourite daughter's illness. He talked of somebody's revenge, and she heard him muttering when he fell into his usual naps in his arm-chair.

“Man—if you dare to carry out your threatening, I shall die of the shame—the terrible dishonour!”

He still attempted to write, but he was of less use than ever, and ceased to live as he had formerly done, according to

rule. Indeed, so little note did he now take of time, and so little difference did he make between the day and the night, that it seemed as if he could sympathise with the odd joy with which Rousseau sold his watch, revelling in the thought that he should never again need to know the time.

Yet he was vexed at little things, especially at supposed slights to his authority. And when for a time Rosette grew worse, and in spite of Maitland's careful manœuvring the bad news reached him, he would try to appear as if he were not affected by the intelligence, or he would even inquire after the invalid in a measured voice which betrayed no emotion—though occasionally he would burst out into pathetic lamentations, pitifully unlike his usual tone.

Maitland's heart yearned over him in vain; pitying him in the little efforts which he evidently made to keep from painful thought, or to eke out the tedium of his failing life. There was so much

that was unnatural and unreal in it, that she longed for some one to help her, and once suggested that Mr. Moorcroft should be sent for to see Rosette. Then for the first time she heard the true reason of the clergyman's absence.

"I told him not to visit here," said her father constrainedly, after she had put the question to him many times.

"You told him?—how strange!"

"If you really wish to know the reason, I will tell you. He came here one day and said he had something to ask me. I said, a little imprudently perhaps, that I would promise him anything if he did not ask me to part with *you*."

"Oh, father, how *could* you?" exclaimed Maitland, flushing red. "How could you subject me to such a humiliation?"

"It was no humiliation," said Mr. Gathorne, sturdily. "His intention was evident in his face, and he never denied

it. But I did it for the best. I wished to spare him the pain of a refusal."

"Oh, how you must have wounded him! No wonder he has not come near us. I could never have taught his children if I had known anything of this," said the girl, stooping her head and trying to hide from herself the strange joy which lightened her heart at her father's unexpected words.

"And—and—of course," she murmured, "he has never spoken about it again?"

"You are terribly curious," he answered irritably. "Did you not always tell me you did not wish to marry? and if you had married anybody did I not suppose it would be Stanton?"

"Hush, hush!" she answered, trying to divert his thoughts to other subjects, and forgetting her selfish happiness in her anxiety for his comfort.

For her instinct did not tell her in vain that something more than she could guess at was wrong.

\* \* \* \*

August passed into September, September into October, and the news which reached them from the Continent made Maitland forget her own cares. Towards the end of that eventful October, Rosette's child was born. With the money left her by De Lafarges, Maitland had taken a comfortable little house for her sister in the village, where, provided with comforts and suitable attendants, by slow degrees Rosette grew better. She had abandoned the doll now, in preference for the living baby. The restoration of her memory, which had at first been accompanied by faint, glimmering, haunting reminiscences, was no longer partial but complete. Her intelligence was returning and grew stronger day by day, till Maitland, trusting in the doctor's prophecies, looked forward to the happy



time when the smile of the babe would draw the love of God into the heart of the mother. As yet she did not venture to speak to her of her husband. But she had heard once from Paul just after he reached France, and even *his* prospects seemed to be less doubtful. She trusted to hear yet of brave deeds of which she could tell her sister. What matter that all the man's hopes had in one sense been wrecked, and that the husks with which he had fed himself had ceased to be satisfying, if yet, amid his self-loathing and misery, he could hear the still small voice, "Come to me;" and if he could trust to that faith which should be a cheerful and sanguine thing, forgetting the things that are behind, and taking heart to do better?

But Maitland could not so encourage herself about her father. For, unknown to her, that remorse which makes men act like fatalists, and which drives the soul to the polar region of despair, had

long been taking possession of him, till his flesh had seemed to be shrivelled up as by a pitiless blast.

One night, early in November, when Maitland had retired to rest, the poor old man, with his eyes open as if he were a sleep-walker, frightened her by coming into her room. She uttered a startled cry as he came near to her, dressed in his shirt and trousers, and with a candle dripping over his lean fingers, and held as if it would set fire to the shirt. The sound of her exclamation made him drop the candle, and it was extinguished on the floor, leaving them in darkness. At the same moment he seemed to wake from the sleep or state of partial stupefaction in which his faculties had been wrapped, and not aware of his daughter's presence, he said in a half whisper,

“Is anyone here?”

“Anyone—who?” asked Maitland, in the same whisper, trembling a little as she struck another light.

He did not answer; he stood perfectly motionless, his arms resting on the bed-post, and still, as she tried to fancy, in that state of sleep walking. Evidently he did not see her, but she soon ceased to think he was asleep. His eyes were surveying the opposite wall—up and down, down and up—as if he were following the movements of something which was visible to him. He was so engrossed in the interest of this watching that he almost seemed to stop breathing.

“Look at it,” he said, presently, “don’t you see it? *It* called me and I followed it into this room.”

“*What* called you?” she asked anxiously, trying to get the truth from him.

“The child,” he said irritably, as if he had forgotten that she did not know of the story which was haunting him. “Many a night I’ve woke from my nightmare, after seeing the child’s white piteous face framed in its yellow hair looking in at the window to me, praying to be let in. In the

horror of that nightmare I have tried to help it, when it begged me to take it home, and my fingers have closed on a little clammy hand. I have always dreaded the cold weather," he added with a shudder, "for the horrid thing comes on cold nights; they say there was no fire in her bedroom when she died. What, didn't you know? *His* life, he said, was ruined because his child died, and he has revenged himself by making me the destroyer of my own wife and child."

"Hush! you are talking wildly—you may well call it nightmare. You have been dreaming," she said trying to humour him, and leading him gently back to his room. The sense of filial duty and reverence which was at the root of her nature, made her forbear to blame him, though she grew paler and paler, and stunned with the revelation which seemed to be coming upon her. In his bedroom the pen and ink still stood upon the table, and some sheets of note paper,

half written upon, lay by their side.

“I wish it *were* a dream,” he said with a heavy sigh; “and that I were young again with all my life before me—before my poor wife died of a broken heart, and my little Rosette had no one left to guide her. Ah—I might have shaped for myself such a happy destiny if I had never appropriated that money;” he added, sinking with a groan upon a chair, still struggling with shadows, as she could see by the absorbed expression of his face, and taking her for some one else. Some one who seemed strangely to excite his emotions. For the large drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead, and a sob shook his chest as he continued.

“Ah, I thought you would come to me once again before my death to settle the old scores with me; and they are settled now. You can’t reproach me now, for you have had your revenge—an eye for an eye, a wrench for a wrench. *Your* cruelty has been deliberate—more de-

liberate than mine. *You* cursed my innocent little girl, and your curse has lighted upon her. In the exceptional condition in which I found myself, hemmed in by straitened circumstances, and subject to your constant threatenings of exposure, I could not give my pretty daughter her accustomed pleasures. She was cut off from the recreations natural to her age. She could not live with her aunt, and at home—in the miserable place we called home—I saw her languish before my eyes. What would you have? We were a little hard on her, and one day she furtively quitted her home—quitted it to be honestly married—but to a man who made her miserable, and who was utterly unworthy of her.”

Then raising himself suddenly, and walking with rapid steps across the room, he added,

“Your daughter you say, died—

you say it was *I* who let her die, that it was through my neglect. But *you*—you have deliberately killed two women by one blow, and both of those women were my most beloved—my wife and then my daughter. God will never pardon you if my poor girl dies—or if she lives on with her reason destroyed! Is it not frightful? Can any sorrow be compared to my sorrow? I ask you to remove the curse from me before I go to my long rest. Surely now we are quits, and I ought to be free from you. I have been the heaviest loser, you ought to be satisfied.”

He was still speaking abstractedly of himself, as of a total stranger—unaware of the imprudent confession which he had made in a moment of despair to his daughter. That he was more sinned against than sinning was her impression, even in her sensitiveness

and conscientiousness, and as she left him—still speaking in a broken voice, and kneeling in his bed—kneeling, but not praying, if prayer must consist in language—with eyes and hands uplifted, she felt that it was more than she could bear and that she *must* do something to help him out of this mire

“It is a delusion,” she thought to herself, even now not doubting him; the intense filial reverence which was so strong a part of her character making her sure that he must be falsely accusing himself.

She remembered the case of a banker's clerk who had suddenly taken it into his head that it was he who had robbed the shareholders, when the directors had been in fault; and how this poor clerk, suffering from an excess of morbid conscientiousness, had insisted on giving himself up to the law, and had determined to bear what he declared was his proper sentence.



What could her father be suffering from, but some such morbid mania, when he was gazing vacantly about, and muttering unintelligibly to himself? So she sent for the doctor who attended Rosette, and informed him that Mr. Gathorne was suffering from a delusion to which she feared he was subject.

“Better not speak to him about it,” said the doctor, after examining the patient the next morning, and deciding that it was “an attack of temporary monomania,” very naturally attacking a man whose health was much enfeebled by the labour of past years, and by neglect of proper sanitary precautions.

“His brain,” said the man of medicine, “is evidently much disturbed—his conversation is rambling to incoherence—he keeps harping on the supposed cruelty of some one who has cursed his daughter, who has tried for years to ruin his character. He also accuses himself of all sorts of queer things. But I am strongly

inclined to think it is a case of mental disturbance, and that it will require careful watching to keep it from degenerating into dementia of a chronic character. The main thing is the *discovery of, and the removal of the exciting cause*. But that must be done gently—it will require the utmost prudence—have you any wise friend who can help you? If the mania becomes violent, the case may be critical.”

And Maitland began to think seriously whether she *had* any “wise friend” on whom she could depend, especially as the doctor went on to prescribe an opiate, and to add that in time tonics and sea-bathing, which she could not afford, might prove effectual. Her father alarmed her very much that day. He wanted to shave himself, and she feared to trust him with the razor. *Was* it as the doctor said, and did the dreamy facial expression and the relaxed muscles about the mouth—with the habit that he had

always had of counting up figures and adding up long sums—prove that the brain was seriously affected? She suddenly thought of Mr. Moorcroft. It was very difficult for her to make up her mind to go to him, yet who—after all—could be so fitted to guide her? In the absence of the Vicar he stood in the place of her parish clergyman, and he had always been wonderfully good in trying to consider her wishes. She remembered how she had once had courage to say to him,

“Oh, I wish they wouldn't lock the doors of our churches. I feel as if it would be such a relief sometimes, when my mind is burdened and agitated, to be able to slip away into a quiet church, and kneel there and forget it all, and I dare say there are many others who feel about it as I do,” and how after that the church door had *always* stood open. In every little thing he had always been good to her, and as to that passing fancy of his

which her poor father had mentioned to her, doubtless he had forgotten all about it long before this.

Thus it came about that on the following evening she made up her mind to go to James Moorcroft. And he forgetting (when she said that she had come to ask a favour of him) the thought which had stood like a barrier between them, and which had sharpened all his sufferings,—the thought of his rival's handsome face, charm of manner, and refinement of taste; and of the more than probability that now when Rosette was disposed of, Maitland and the good-looking owner of Caerwyn might make a match of it, as if the younger sister had never been heard of—assured her that he was ready to do anything she could ask him.

But when, proceeding to pour out all her story, she appealed to him to help her father who was so falsely accusing himself, and when she added,

“He wanders a good deal, and is always adding up figures—and talking as if his neglect had caused the death of some one, or as if he had been accused of appropriating money. The doctor says that when he regains his bodily strength his reason like Rosette’s may be permanently restored, but I doubt if he will ever regain that strength,” he could only shake his head and answer sadly,

“We ought not to interfere with the workings of conscience.”

It was hard for him to explain to her ; for of all the fine traits of character which he had admired in this girl, none had won his admiration and respect more than the filial reverence which she had shown to a man who was so immeasurably her inferior. It was hard for him to try to tell her the main facts of the story which had reached him—little by little—and which he could not help piecing together.

For when he tried to do so as

gently as he could, she shrugged her shoulders, and smiled a smile of ironical pity.

"Accuse *my father*," she exclaimed, "of an ignoble abuse of confidence—an abuse amounting to a theft! What object could he have gained by it?"

And then she continued, finding he did not answer,

"My father is old—he is sometimes weak—but everybody who knows him, knows that he is the soul of honour. And to say that he deceived in the way that you tell me, and meanly abused a trust that was placed in him! Fortunately no one who knows him will believe the story."

The good man suffered, but he answered firmly,

"*It is true.*"

He knew she was not the woman to thank him for hiding the truth from her.

Her confidence began to forsake her. She trembled in every limb. Yet for a time she still persisted,

“It is an infamous calumny. I do not accuse you of the calumny, for you have been very kind not to mention it,” she said in a voice which was scarcely audible; “and yet I cannot help comforting myself by knowing that most people will not believe it.”

He was pale and troubled, but yet knowing that uncertainty is the most intolerable of sufferings, he unlocked a drawer, and produced a couple of letters. They were not anonymous as usual, but were signed “Mark Eylmer,” and Maitland, even in her trouble, took note of the address.

“These were written,” he said, “in answer to a threatening of mine that the man who had for years been trying to injure Mr. Gathorne by what I believed to be calumnious statements—the man who had at last been traced—should either

withdraw these assertions, or be prosecuted for defamation of character. I received the letters more than a year ago, and as soon as you have seen them they had better be destroyed."

She took the letters and read them, but her body vibrated as if she had received an electric shock, and a new form of indignation dried the tears on her cheeks.

"My father has erred," she said, as she gave them back, "but the man who wrote those letters, the man who could cherish his wicked revenge for more than fifteen years, who could pursue another with constant torture, and never give the *coup de grâce*, is the greater sinner of the two."

James Moorcroft did not answer. He understood Maitland too thoroughly to attempt to interfere with her. He did not even offer his assistance when she drew down her veil, and said she must



return home to see if the opiate had done its work, though he noticed that her step was less firm than usual, and feared the failure of her bodily strength.

For the first time, and with a sore heart, she understood the meaning of the heavy inheritance which from her childhood had descended to her. Hers, she felt, must be the tarnished honour which the broken-hearted father had laid down. And she was strong as usual to bear it, in no stoic spirit, but with the true strength of her loving heart and her noble womanhood.

During the whole of that walk home, she repeated the doctor's words to herself,

"The main thing is the discovery of, and the removal of the exciting cause."

There was but one way, and she said nothing about it to anyone.

Early the next morning she called

at Mr. Moorcroft's house dressed as for a journey, and carrying a little bag.

Her face flushed a little, but she held out her hand and her voice was firm as she said,

"I am going to London, and must be absent one night. My father is ill, I am very anxious about him, and though I have left him in charge of the best nurse in the village, I am troubled about him and about them all. Will you watch over them in my absence?"

"Surely," he said, his face brightening, "I will do anything that I can. But you—you are not well yourself, your hand burns like a coal. I advise you not to go. Is the visit so important?"

"Don't be afraid," she said with a little smile, "I have no time to be ill. And the visit? Yes, it is of great importance, it is to a man who was once a friend

of my father's. My father has a great wish to see him once more—before——” and here her voice broke a little, “before he dies.”

## CHAPTER IX.

MAITLAND no sooner found herself in the train for London, than she was terrified at the decisiveness of the step she had taken. Her prompt action in the emergency was characteristic of herself, for it had been caused by the irrepressible impulse of her love. And now, difficult as it was to her, she nerved herself to go through with it, though the effort was a great one to a girl who knew nothing about London, and who had seldom been away from home except to the school at Hereford.

She felt strangely sad and weary, since these shadows from other lives had again fallen upon hers. But the time had passed in which she felt as if she could only lie down in despair under the juniper-tree in the wilderness. She no longer allowed herself to think, "Why are so many people's lives so hard, why do so many miss what they need?" She had trust in the merciful Fatherhood of God.

The night preceding her journey had been a cloudy one; and as she sat up, after she had parted from her father, making preparations for her journey, the howling of the dog had been heard through the door, and the wind was sighing and tossing the branches of the leafless trees.

"The snow will be coming soon," she thought; as she looked at the cold grey sky, "sooner than usual to us; but it will hardly be coming yet. I wonder how *he* will bear the Winter."

She had easily found the address for which she was seeking among her

father's papers. It coincided with the one shown to her by Mr. Moorcroft, and recurred more than once on rejected envelopes—and half-torn papers.

“*Captain Eylmer.*

9, Great Coram Street,  
London.”

Once in London, it was not difficult for her to find Great Coram Street; for though she did not obtain too much deference from the cabman—who instantly noticed the appearance of home-manufacture and skilful combination in the cheap materials of her dress, and was not impressed by the importance of the unassuming little figure carrying its small bag—he contented himself with charging her twice as much as his due, and set her down with prompt exactitude at a late hour in the afternoon, in the dingy old street, at the door of a dismal half-deserted looking house, with a bill for “apartments” put up in the drawing-room window.

"Is it for the lodgings?" asked an old woman who opened the door, looking suspiciously at Maitland, and glancing at the same time at the lamps which were already lit.

"No," said the girl, whose heart was quaking at the difficult duty she had before her, and who was terrified at the merest thought of failure, but who did not believe in diplomacy and double dealing; "No, it is not the lodgings."

"Well, what is it then?" said the woman, speaking sharply, and also glancing at the cheap dress and modest little figure, "I like to understand what people mean—you may as well speak out if you want me to listen to you."

"I *will* be intelligible," said Maitland directly, for she also liked to be above board and honest, "I am the daughter of one of your master's oldest friends, and it is of the utmost importance for me to see him."

"See the master! why, it would be as

much as my place is worth—he never sees no one, except it is on business.”

“Say the truth then, that I have come to see him on business.”

She shook her head.

“Why that’s not the sort of business—As often as he’s told me that he has no friends.”

“But he had friends once,” pleaded Maitland earnestly, interposing her figure so that the servant could not close the door. “He had friends once, and one of them is dying. I have come all the way from North Wales with a message for him.”

She spoke quietly, but with a certain distinctness of accent which showed that something had been roused in her, which was not to be checked even by insults, and which made her determined to hold her ground.

“Oh, very well,” answered the woman, jerking the dip candle which she held in her hand, and with a kind of



cheerful resignation to injury in her voice and manner, "you may force yourself in—for I know a lady when I see one, whether or not she's grandly dressed—and I am not so dreadfully rude and rough as to turn a lady into the streets. So you may force your way in, but it won't do any good. I have told you already, and I'm not one to eat my own words—he won't see you—not if you waited here till Doomsday. Good gracious!" she exclaimed, her manner suddenly altering. "Can't I get you something? Why, how white you look!"

Maitland fetched a deep sigh, tried to smile, and confessed that she felt a little strange. She passed her hand once or twice across her forehead, where the cold moisture was standing. And then, before the really kind-hearted housekeeper could go in search of water, she fell back with drooping head—fainting—in her arms. The swoon did not last long, and soon afterwards she found

herself in a miserable little back parlour with the woman, who she soon found was the only servant in the house; and who half penitently, half defiantly told her "how she had stopped her fall because she could not help it"—"you should never have taken that long journey," she explained, "it's plain to see it was too much for you. You've taxed your constitution beyond your strength—for don't I know what ladies are? You'll be ill, have a fever or something, and then goodness knows what I am to do with you."

"No; I don't think I am going to be ill," answered Maitland, refusing a cup of tea, and denying the accusation as she had denied it to James Moorcroft. "I am very sorry if my coming is so inconvenient to you. But I am ready to take all the blame, and all the consequences on myself. Cannot you show me in now to see your master?"

The woman shook her head.

"I don't like it," she said, "but since you are so earnest about it—I'll tell you what I'll do. If you aren't afraid to sleep here to-night—you're noways fit to be going out again—I'll wait for an opportunity to introduce you to the master to-morrow morning. I warn you I am not over-satisfied about it. He may treat you as you won't like—I'm afraid of him myself, at times he's that queer, and for all the years I've lived with him, I have never taken such a liberty yet."

"You will not repent it," said Maitland gratefully.

And then her informant became more garrulous, and told her much about "the master;" how she had lived with him for fifteen years, and how there had been sudden deaths since she had lived with him—especially the sudden death of the second Mrs. Eylmer, and how, till within a week of her death, he insisted on affirming doggedly that his wife's health was excellent.

The poor lady, it seemed, had the same idea, and despised the warnings of the doctor, till one day she had a fit of coughing—broke a blood-vessel, and died. And Captain Eylmer, as the servant told her, took this second trouble worse than the former ones—defied God and man, and cursed the day he was born—till nobody cared to live with him, he “hectored over them so.”

Maitland did not like to question, but her informant continued,

“And he have lost money, and that sort of thing, since we have been in London, so that the maids have been turned off, and he has grown miser-like; and now he has packed up nearly all his furniture into the attics, and talks of trying to let the other rooms. There is the board up, but nothing comes of it. People are scared at the master’s look—he’s so sickly-looking, and proud to ’em, and nobody has come here this long

time, for the rooms are dull and bare, and it's a miserable sort of place."

"Yet the rooms are large and handsome," suggested Maitland, whose usual good common-sense had returned to her with the fresh hopes for the morrow, and who was trying to please her new friend by forcing herself to share in a bread-and-cheese supper.

"Tall and handsome enough if they were inhabited—but now that the master has grown so domineering-like, he won't let 'em be decently furnished. He'll only pay now and then for a charwoman to help clean—and it stands to reason I've not much time for cleaning myself. Indeed, it's not everybody he'd get to live with him. For it's queer like, as if you were in a house with a ghost at night. But *I* never think of it—I make him pay *me* properly, and then he may please himself with his queer ways. I used to get the creeps sure enough when

I was a girl, but it's only when folks reads silly stories that they get the creeps."

Maitland slept at intervals, for she was worn out, that night, but not before she listened sadly to a lonely footstep walking the room overhead, and whenever she woke from her troubled dreams, the prayer seemed to be going on as pauselessly as the beating of her pulses, that the unforgiving old man in his last days should be set free from a desolation which he had brought upon himself, and that his curse might no longer seem to fall upon the head of another more wretched than he was.

In these moments of wakefulness when she could reason on the difficult task which she had undertaken, her courage was rather strengthened than lessened by all that she had heard. For she began to pity Mark Eylmer, as much as she pitied her own father. She thought of his isolated existence in that

dull house—like the existence of a disembodied soul, rather than the healthy life of a man—cut off from his own kind by his cruel feelings of revenge; she could have shed tears over the forsaken unhappy soul, cast into a moral and spiritual prison from which no earthly power could set it free, till it had paid the uttermost farthing which could be wrung from it by suffering, and all because it had refused to agree with its adversary.

The face which Maitland called “plain,” wore that sublime expression which made it often look grand, as she rose the next morning. Strange to say, all her feelings of fear had deserted her. She had entirely forgotten herself, or what she might have to brave, and had her task been as difficult as that of Stanley when he was told to go in search of Livingstone, or had she been called upon to walk over burning ploughshares, I believe she would have undertaken it from a simple feeling of duty.

“There now—don’t blame *me* if he insults you or knocks you down. It wouldn’t take much to knock you down—there isn’t a great deal of you;” said the woman, whose sympathies had been enlisted by that fainting fit, pushing her *protégée* suddenly through an open door after she had cleared her master’s breakfast things.

The door closed behind her with a sharp click.

And Mark Eylmer, who was growing old enough to suffer from the wintry weather, and who had certainly felt himself to be more forsaken and miserable than usual during the last few dreary November days—so forsaken that he began to wonder at times if he was alive, or if it would make any difference if he were dead—woke up from one of his absent reveries to see a little woman insufficiently clothed to protect her from the cold, with a very pale face and clear eyes which lit the face like stars, and



looked at him steadily, standing in the middle of the room.

The room was gloomy and miserably furnished, as the woman downstairs had told her it was, and there was a moral deterioration in Mark Eyler's appearance, observable in his slouching gait and morose expression of face, which arrested her—not from any loss of courage, but from a doubt as to the best way of addressing him—and made her pause irresolute in the centre of the room.

His eyes seemed to say. "How dare you disturb me?" but his voice, which sounded small and starved for a man of his physical strength, only asked her.

"What do you want?"

"I come to you from George Gathorne, who was once your friend—" she commenced.

But he interrupted her in a voice which had become harsh, impatient, and fretful.

“I know no George Gathorne—but a criminal who appropriated money which did not belong to him, and who was spared a felon’s punishment by the mercy of the man he had injured.”

She kept her upright unbending attitude, and yet he could see that his words had wounded her, by the sudden movement of the eyelids as she answered.

“He has paid all that money now—paid it by slow and painful degrees. If any debt remains, I will devote my life to wiping it out. Tell me the utmost that is due to you, for I am his daughter.”

“His *daughter!*” The words grated on him. How had the wretch Gathorne any right to have a daughter, when *he* was childless in his old age? Yet he looked keenly at Maitland. Could this be the beautiful girl who in her childhood had reminded him so much of his golden-haired Mary, and who instead of withering, had lived and prospered under his

curse? No, he saw that Maitland's beauty was of the spiritual sort rather than the material, and he tried to assume his impenetrable shell of pride and reserve as the interloper stepped quickly up to him, bent on conciliation. She saw that her voice seemed to irritate him and she dropped it as she said.

"I know that my presence is an eyesore to you, yet I entreat you to pardon my importunity, and let me take your forgiveness to my father, for he has paid the debt which he owed you—to the utmost. His heart has broken and he is *dying*. You only can do anything for him in his great extremity. He cannot die in peace till you forgive him. Once you were friends—you loved each other. He sinned—through neglect—but you, deliberately—with calculation."

His face was convulsed with sudden passion, as he rose and looked at this daring girl, who, without any lady-arts or studied manners, ventured to tell him

the truth to his face. Should he heap all possible abuse upon her—should he hound her out of the room—or should he further assail the dying man, whose death, conscience told him, had probably been accelerated by his long-continued persecutions—by telling the child that the father was a hypocrite, a villain, a perjurer? No, he was astonished that anyone should venture to touch his sore, but he was deterred by something which seemed to tell him that he had before him one of the few women who bravely receive the sharpest thrusts, and uncomplainingly gather the spears into their own bosoms. He did not mean to be cruel to her; yet in his wrath he stood upright, and his eyes turned fiercely on her as he muttered.

“I cannot alter it. I have never forgiven him. Go and tell him that I *cannot*. My curse is on him and everything belonging to him. Yet I have saved him from exposure—he has not been

entirely disgraced. You do not know what the world would have said of his conduct."

"I may not know what the world would say, but I believe I do know what *Christ* would;" she answered him steadily as she stood before him, still unflinching. "Have you ever thought that your curse might rebound on your own head? You cannot pray the Lord's prayer—God is your enemy whilst you are in this state. May He have mercy on you, and not let you die till you have forgiven my father!"

His astonishment was so great that he sank back on his seat, before he again surveyed the dauntless little woman.

"I have nothing to do with these canting arguments," he said, after a few minutes' pause, without moving a muscle of his face. "I have to do with facts, and facts are stubborn things. If your father thought I should suffer un-

revenged, like an idiot, he has found out his mistake by this time. But I have nothing to do with you—stand you aside.”

“Do you mean you will be cruel to him when he is dying?” she continued, finding it hard not to reiterate the arguments which were so unpalatable to her hearer. “Dying! *dying*! you surely cannot understand! Why even if you never open a Bible, you can leave your enemies to God. God’s hand is heavy on him just now.”

“He brought it on himself whatever he has to suffer, the shame and infamy were *his*,” he answered. For even at this moment the recollection of his child, which had so often turned his kindly emotions to gall and wormwood, and which had made him feel in past times as if he would have liked to fit the man who had neglected her with St. Luke’s iron crown, or stretch him on Damien’s bed of steel, that one recollection over-

matched the earnestness of Maitland's pleading, and was proof against the abandonment of her supplication. It made him fanatical in his sense of justice, binding him with cords against his better self.

"He brought it on himself," he repeated, rising again from his chair as if the matter were dismissed, and leaning, gaunt and pale, against the chimney-piece.

Then for the first time Maitland's heart sank, and her unsuccessful attempt began to tell upon her nerves. This creed of Paganism, with the mercilessness of the man who held it, caused in her a momentary revulsion of feeling.

"I see I need not address myself to your *heart*," she cried with sudden indignation; "but you can reason. Is it fair, is it wise to carry your stern determination to such excess? Extreme justice is always more or less unjust, for all violent sentiment is necessarily exaggerated.

And anger is of all our illusions the most deceitful when we attempt to carry it on for the course of a lifetime. Ideas and sentiments are every day changing, whilst he who cherishes revenge remains unchanged. The man whom you would punish to-day is no longer the man who sinned against you yesterday."

"What can you mean by talking in this way to me?" he asked, suddenly striking his forehead in his rage.

"I was only talking as anyone might talk without a spark of religion," she said apologetically, with a break in her voice in spite of her assumed nonchalance. "I did not even ask you to accept the Christian version of the old pagan idea of averting the omen, 'Overcome evil with good,' and yet I think one of the saddest sights in all the world, if not the very saddest, is that of a soul conquered by evil instead of rising above it."



“And you think *I* am conquered by it? You are a bold speaker,” he said, unconsciously using the very words which Paul de Lafarges had used once before to her. “I can’t imagine how George Gathorne managed to have his daughter taught like this. You evidently think you know human nature pretty well,” he added, with a fresh attempt at cynical anger, though when he raised his eyes to hers, he was touched by the immeasurable pity and sadness in her face. “But you do not know *my* story, you have only heard one half of it. Let me ask you, do you think I should have borne my grief like a savage, wounding myself with knives and spears, as well as wounding my enemy, if that grief had been a natural one, like common human griefs? You say you believe in prayer. I besieged Heaven with my prayers, night and day, day and night, and always for my little one. If God had answered my prayer, it might have been different. I used to

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have some faint belief in the mercy of God."

"And you will have the belief again, when you show bare human mercy," she whispered, nothing daunted; "for your prayer *was* answered, though not as you meant it."

"Why should I think of your father? Did he take care of my child when I was shipwrecked far away from her, thinking when the winds blew hard that I heard the sobbing of a melancholy little voice? My poor child's money-portion was too great a trial for his virtue. If he had been an arrant speculator, I might not have wondered so much at it."

"She was a lovely, charming little creature. I have been told so, and I can believe it," ventured Maitland, gently.

"Who? my little Mary? She was simply the most exquisite being ever sent into a world of trouble. Half-angel and half-child, they must have been devils who ill-treated her;" and a sound like a

sob rose in his throat. "Ah, my poor darling, my little one!" he exclaimed, as he got up and paced the room. And Maitland began to have hope for him, when for the first time he showed feeling, and she noticed the sudden motion of his arm over his eyes, as if he were dashing away a tear. She had done what she wished. She had roused the heart in him again at the risk of incurring his curses; he was no longer of adamant.

Her own eyes were full of tears as she answered gently,

"I do not believe she was ever so neglected as you think, there has been much exaggeration. But even admitting, for the sake of argument, that she had not proper care when she was ailing, and that your trusted friend seemed to desert you, there was *another Friend* who watched over her for you, and who is keeping her for you safely still—He who carries the lamb in his arms. Do you ever think of the little one at

home at rest, waiting for *you* in the bosom of the Father, whilst you are cherishing a feeling which must keep you apart? Why, even an angel might sob at that. It is the consequence of always brooding over one idea," she added mournfully. "You have thought of the loss of the child, you have never thought of God."

The stern man wavered. The voice of nature was contending with him, in spite of the fierce warfare which had so long raged in his heart. He paced the room with hasty strides, and clenched the nails into his own flesh, as he said, dropping out his words one by one.

"I believed all this once, but I have not believed it lately."

"No wonder," she answered pityingly, but steadily, "you were in an attitude of mind which made belief impossible."

"I have been—a little—too quick—in my judgment—perhaps."

And a glory beamed over Maitland's face—her limbs shook, and her lips trembled—as she went out from the man's presence, convinced that after a few hours she should gain her suit.

## CHAPTER X.

MAITLAND stayed one night longer than she had intended in London. It was too much to expect Captain Eylmer to visit her father—the habits of years are not so easily altered—but she had gained the main object of her visit, his message of forgiveness.

And it was with a heart lightened of half its burden that she arrived at Llandyffryn. The snow had fallen in her absence, as she had anticipated. The earth was everywhere shrouded with it,

and the hoar-frost was sparkling on the branches of some of the wind-shaken trees, as she got out of the train and prepared to walk to the cottage. The lights were glimmering in the other cottages when she reached Llandyffryn, with feet that stumbled from fatigue, as if she were recovering from illness. The snow had again begun to fall quickly, and the whole prospect was uninviting. But she was glad in spite of everything; her heart was rejoicing at the thought of another note tuned in the vast instrument of life. It was a kind message which Mark Eylmer had sent to his one-time friend, condoning his past offences, and making excuses for him, and he had given it with slow tears which seemed to be wrung from his whole nature. So though Maitland was pale, and trembled, there was a joyful glitter in her eyes.

"I have come back again, dear. I have been to London and come back," she said, as she burst joyfully into the cottage.

But her voice resounded in the empty room, and the silence seemed to appal her. The fire in the grate had smouldered to ashes, but one of the lattice windows was open, and a damp cold air filled the room.

“What is Mrs. Harris thinking about? They call her the best nurse in the village, and I left her in charge of him,” she said, with a shiver. “I thought she could be trusted.”

In an inner room she found the nurse in a drunken sleep. An empty brandy bottle was by her side, but when shaken out of her slumber she could give no account of Mr. Gathorne except that she had not seen him for some time.

*He was out* then—it was all plain to Maitland now—out alone in the darkness—in the pitiless snow, and in the driving wind! What could have driven him out but the horror of his own thoughts when the lethargy was over, and conscience again awoke in him?



Perhaps he might have had some faint recollection of what he had told his daughter, and the very shame might have driven him out to die in the darkness, for he had always, as she remembered, been so sensitive in his pride.

He had never told her any of the circumstances of his past life till the other night, when in his partial dementia it had seemed as if his hidden thoughts were laid bare, and as if his soul were forced at last to make its avowal to some other soul—yet why should he have minded so telling her all the truth? How much better it would have been if he could have reasoned differently—if he could have said to her from the first. “Some day, with God’s help, you shall know all the truth.”

And now when she had hoped to communicate the glad news of reconciliation to him, it seemed as if her errand had been all in vain.

What could she do? It was of no use for her to question the drunken woman or

to attempt to extract the truth from her. Yet no time was to be lost, and she thought in her pressing necessity of Mr. Moorcroft.

It was about eleven o'clock when she stole to the door of the vicarage. The lights were already extinguished in the house, for the people of Landyffryn kept early hours; and James Moorcroft was already preparing for rest, and looking at the snow from his bedroom window, when he was startled by noticing a dark figure gliding along the road, and then there came a timid knock at the door.

He opened the door himself, and looked with astonishment at his visitor. It seemed like the realisation of a dream which had visited him occasionally in his solitary hours, and of a form which had often flitted before his mind. Yet he was startled and shocked out of all prudence by the apparition in the flesh.

“Maitland!” he exclaimed, uncon-

sciously using her Christian name; "Maitland--and alone, at this time of night!"

"Don't make a noise," she answered, "but hear me."

"Every hour," she said as she told her story, "I am more and more uneasy. To whom could I come but to you? You are his friend, and you will be anxious too."

"*Anxious!*" It seemed but a light word, though he guessed the strain she put upon herself to speak in her usually measured and self-possessed tones, and knew how impossible it was for her to keep up that strain, when she said the moment afterwards, in a stifled voice, catching his arm with a grip of which she was scarcely aware, "Your horse! For the love of God--be quick!"

"Directly," he said, taking his way to the stable.

She followed, watching him, and looking

so pale and changed that he was touched with pity.

“Don’t you be *too* anxious. I will set out at once. Remember Who it is that ‘cutteth out rivers among the rocks, and bindeth the floods from overflowing,’” he said, trying also to speak quietly, as he saddled the horse. “Would you like me to ask for any other assistance?”

“No,” she said slowly; “you will do all that can be done—and you know how *he* would feel it if we roused any one else, and set all the villagers gossiping.”

There was silence for some moments, and then she burst out in a voice which went to his heart.

“And when will you come back—how soon shall I know?”

“As soon as I can manage it,” he answered; “I think I can guess the way he took—the path he was always fond of. The distance is rather great.”

"Ah—how can I bear it!" she said, sinking to the ground."

"Trust in God," he answered, and she burst into tears, his eyes growing moist from sympathy.

"Come," he exclaimed suddenly, his pure trustworthy eyes meeting hers, which looked at him so fearlessly, "I cannot leave you. You are suffering too acutely. I never intended to ride on the horse myself, but I will place you upon it—if you are as brave as you look. I would not take you if you were a timid woman, but I know your courage, and I believe you can help."

"Oh, thank you," she said; "how good of you! but of course—of course—I could not think of myself. If *he* can bear it, how can I be afraid?"

"It is a terrible night—you can scarcely see a hand before you. But I know every step of the way, and Lubin knows it even better than I do."

He placed his coat on the horse to

make a saddle for her, and they set out, he holding the bridle. It was the first time in her life she had ever mounted a horse without being able to use the stirrups. But she never thought of it, though the horse, worried by the snow, and never ridden by a woman before, shook his head continually as if to shake off his burden.

Nothing was said till they reached the edge of the mountains, and then James Moorcroft asked her,

“Will you go round by the road? the shortest way skirts the edge.”

“Go the shortest way—the shortest way,” she answered quickly, not conscious of repeating the same words over and over again.

“Here and there it looks dangerous, but it is—I think—really safe. You are not afraid?”

“Oh, no,” she said; “go on.”

And he murmured to himself, “She is never afraid of anything.”

The horse was getting deeper in the snow. The moon shone out now, and showed the billowy white ocean, with swells and falls in it like that of the waves of the sea. The pathway was destroyed, but here and there there was an upright stone, by which guides familiar with the country, might find their way. The stones looked like dirty dots here and there in the white ocean, and the danger of sinking up to the neck in the snow for the first time appeared imminent.

The horse began to lose his footing, and suddenly he stood still.

"Drive him on," said Maitland imploringly ; " we are losing precious time."

"I dare not," he answered, " we are close to the edge;" and he pointed out the razor-like outlines of the serrated rocks; "too close to the edge, and he might rear."

Then for the first time a fact occurred to her which had hitherto escaped her notice, and she saw with horror that her

benevolent helper was himself walking outside the horse.

"If it is dangerous," she asked, "why do you walk there?"

"I am trying to see the landmarks," he answered, but did not add that he was beginning to despair of finding them."

"I am sure if that is safe for *you*, that this is safe for me. God will take care of us," she said, "let us go on;" striking with her hand on the flank of the unwilling animal, and urging it by endearing epithets to continue. It went on for a little way, and then stopped, panting and distressed. The mountains and the distant ravines were now lost in a plain of vapour.

"We have lost the way!" she cried in an agony; "your horse seems as if it had never been this way before."

At that moment, through an opening in the clouds, they saw the fantastic outlines of distant mountains, but the cur-



tains of cloud seemed to be drawn again by invisible fingers, almost as quickly as they had been opened. Nothing was seen—nothing was heard. The humidity caused by the melting snow had penetrated through Maitland's clothing, and her strength seemed to be suddenly failing her. The difficulty of the long uphill ride over stones and through the thick snow had been greater than she had expected, and she was threatened with a return of the faintness of the previous evening.

“Courage!” he said, “God will help us. I know where we are now, and if we find him at all, we shall find him soon.”

She did not answer what she was beginning to feel, “But if we find him now he will be dead.” She only said, “Let me walk, and you lead the horse.”

He did not guess that she insisted upon walking, because she hoped that

the exertion might keep her from turning faint. Fortunately for her, she was almost past seeing or suffering as she walked on, feeling like a disembodied soul.

Suddenly a big Newfoundland dog that James Moorcroft had taken the precaution of bringing with him, stopped, with its nose close to the ground, and appeared as if it were searching for something near the pathway.

He tried in vain to stop Maitland, who walked straight to the spot—her eyes open and tearless—she was too much excited for tears. He could not stop her, even when she saw what the dog had found—a body, with its right arm and its face quite uncovered, while the rest of it was only hidden by a light covering of snow.

It was the body of Mr. Gathorne. It lay near the pathway on some rocks at the edge of the cliff, where the snow had not drifted, as if it had been his intention, before he became numbed with the cold, to throw

himself over. Maitland knelt down by him, by the edge of the cliff, where her position was almost dangerous, and where she could see the desolate peaks and the weird chasms beneath them—her lips moving as if in prayer. Mr. Moorcroft also stooped down, taking the wrinkled hand, and clasping it in his.

“Tell me the truth!” she whispered. “He is dead—we are too late!”

“No, there is still some lingering warmth—I think it may be possible for us to save him yet;” he said, trying to force some brandy through the half-opened lips.

They laid their burden on the horse, James Moorcroft supporting it, and then, Maitland taking the bridle, they tried to commence the dreary walk down the mountain to the nearest inn. Fortunately the little inn was not far off, it was built for travellers in Summer-time, and stood in the midst of a diffi-

cult pass. But for the whole of the little way Maitland's strength never flagged.

"Make haste! make haste!" was all that she could say, and she repeated it in a continual monotone.

Life was not extinct; Mr. Moorcroft was right.

For ten minutes they kept Maitland in an outer room, in anxiety that was so intense that she could neither speak nor move, and then, when they felt the first pulsation of returning life in the withered hand of the poor old man, they brought her the good news.

For the second time, she burst into tears; she had not shed a tear through the agony of their search.

"Unlike most girls," thought Moorcroft to himself, as he allowed himself to look at her with the love that had been so long repressed, struggled against, and hidden for so many months.

“ Silent when even a soldier might  
cry out, and at other times ready to  
weep for a word.”

## CHAPTER XI.

ON one of the last days in January on the following year, a few women sat in the principal sitting-room of a house in one of the chief thoroughfares of Paris, busied with the dreary occupation of making lint, with frost-bitten fingers, which would hardly move at their work. Their faces were pale and anxious, and the bandages were sometimes blistered with their tears, but they gave no glance out of the window at the street, which was piteously altered. Once only, when the sound of a cannon was some-

what louder than usual, making the glass vibrate, they started, drew their chairs further back, and asked each other if the sound did not seem to be approaching. But no—it was only the wind which brought it nearer, and they settled again to their task.

At the same time, Paul de Lafarges, who was pale and thin like most of his compatriots, was returning from watching the outposts. It would have been almost impossible for his old associates to recognize him in the tall, gaunt figure with cavernous eyes, and with hands on which he had been so wont to pride himself for their aristocratic whiteness now worn rough and red.

He had to go through the Boulevards, which were no longer crowded with fashionably dressed idlers but which were now the daily resort of rough Republican *militaires*, who were ready to “*Citoyen*” you at five minutes’ acquaintance; and he left behind him the once trim and carefully

kept Tuileries, which were now turned into camps for the Mobiles, whilst the Imperial Palace, like most of the public buildings, was converted into a hospital. But De Lafarges was by this time accustomed to the sight. It had almost ceased to be strange to him that the Palais d'Industrie should be used for ambulance stores, or that the Opera House should be turned into a bakery. His thoughts were so occupied with the difficulties of the present that he had almost forgotten the time when the languid, "*boulevardier*" would daintily sip his absinthe at aristocratic cafés, and when the rarest Soyerian cookery could be provided at the restaurants. He forgot to wonder if the old Palace of the Tuileries, which had seen so many dynasties flourish and decay, would ever own another Imperial inmate, or how long Nadar and his staff of *aéronauts* were likely to remain installed at the Orleans railway station. He had even almost forgotten how



Normandy had been reduced by the enemy—how soldiers at Rouen, who had heroically determined to show the world that France could fight to the last against overwhelming numbers, though Paris might be besieged, had all run away to Havre after the slightest of skirmishes. Amiens had been taken; the Rouen journals were suppressed; Dieppe was occupied by the Prussians, and for all that De Lafarges knew to the contrary, the château which he had once by false or fair means called his own might be occupied by the enemy, its only security consisting in its comparative distance from any very large town.

But it was not this which haunted him. It was the thought of the corpses which he was seeing every day with arms upraised, and hands clenched threateningly, or clutched against their sides—it was the look of sharp agony on the dead faces which he had had to leave so often in the moonlight, or with the calm stars

shining above them. He seemed to see nothing but these corpses lying stiff and stark in their immobility, with the pools of blood round them, and to think of nothing but the ruin and dishonour of his country. He had a vague feeling that his own vices and his own love of luxury had helped to bring about these deaths, and the dead faces seemed to reproach him as those of his dying ship-mates reproached the Ancient Mariner.

“Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,  
And cursed him with his eye.”

Even his wife's portrait which he he carried about with him in his pocket, as she had been in early girlhood, with a life so full of possibilities and hope that it used to make his heart ache when he gazed at it, had ceased to reproach him with anything like the same torment now.

For like Job, he had been alone in the

whirlwind and had heard for the first time the voice of God, and like Job he had been ready to smite upon his breast and to cry for the first time in accents of humiliation, "I am vile!" The whirlwind was a reality, with its gusts of icy air which reached him every now and then through his wet clothing and made him shiver; the snow was a reality—there were wreaths of it and heaps of it on the pavement and on the road; the wounded were realities—the livid trembling wounded, some of them more to be pitied than the dead; and the German positions were realities which were no more likely to be carried than they were in the beginning of the siege. And death was a reality—death which would come to him sooner or later. He had braved it in every form, offering himself for the first sorties which were made under shelter of Fort Valérien to season the raw troops, and afterwards for the desperate ones undertaken with the more definite ob-

ject of breaking through the strong lines of the beleaguering army. He knew how slight was the hope to be gained from these sallies, but he had offered himself for them more than once when the clamour of hungry men and women seemed to demand some human sacrifice. More than once, when there had been a mustering of 'battalions and beating of drums, he had made one of the long file of men who had marched steadily through the city with fixed bayonets and grim faces, scarcely noticing the anxious whisper—"It is another sortie;" or trusting themselves to wave a "Good-bye" to the women they loved. And more than once when the rumour had spread through Paris that the troops had been repulsed, he had been one of the few who had marched wearily back, sullen and dejected, whilst carts with the wounded were rumbling through the streets. More than once also he had saved the life of some despairing compatriot,

and there had been one widow and some orphans the less when he returned the next morning.

When he did so, he thought of the wretched suicide for whose death Maitland had held him partially responsible, and then though these sallies were but the vain efforts of heroic despair, and though the result if deferred appeared to him inevitable, his heart was a little lightened of its burden. On this afternoon he allowed his walk to be longer than usual, noticing a balloon which he had watched for some hours as it turned the corner of the street, and seemed at last to hover over the Jardin des Plantes. Many other anxious eyes were watching it too—eyes of the despairing people who knew well how it was only through means of the air that invested Paris could communicate with the rest of the world.

Suddenly their attention was directed to a contrary direction. A feeble buzz of voices was heard, which increased till it became a murmur. All eyes were

turned to the roof of a neighbouring hotel.

"There it is," said one of the famished-looking women with a piercing cry, "on the roof in front of us—don't you see it?"

Then commenced one of the fits of excitement which the sight of a stray pigeon, supposed to be a provincial messenger, always created amongst the population—and which were generally followed by a hunt which greatly endangered the safety of the dispatch which it carried.

Never was Ibis more worshipped by the ancient Egyptians, or the stork by the Dutch, than the pigeon was by the Parisian just at this crisis, when the latter could exclaim in the words of Victor Hugo,

"Vents, dites-leur notre misère,  
Oiseaux, portez leur notre amour."

Yet in vain were official remonstrances issued to save the aerial messengers from being chased from roof to roof, worried with stones, or terrified by the shouts

of the crowd beneath them. De Lafarges tried to caution the people on this occasion. But his caution was not needed. Cold and fatigue had done their work.

"Oh, *la pauvre bête*—it tries to fly," cried the woman who had at first perceived it.

"It falls!" cried another with joined hands. "*Mon Dieu—mon Dieu!*"

"Quick, quick—open the window—some crumbs of bread—a little water!" said another voice.

It was too late. A man more enterprising than the rest had climbed up the front of a house, and caught the bird. He examined its feathers—whilst the others looked at him with beating hearts and open mouths; hoping he might discover some important news. He made a sign that there was nothing, and lifting the bird by its claw, showed that it was dead.

A cry of sorrow and pity burst from the disappointed crowd; and whilst the women sobbed, Paul de Lafarges pursued his way.

“No news from anyone—still no news—it was impossible for him to hear of Rosette either through Normandy, or the English post,” he reflected, as he had often reflected before. “Perhaps she is dead,” he added. “At any rate *I* shall die. I shall never hear from her again.”

It was a long time, six months—an age—since he had left her with scarcely any hope that her reason would return to her again. The homes of the other men were destroyed—homes so cared for, so tended—but he—as he drearily thought—had never had a home in the true sense of the word. What did it matter after all—what did anything matter? At every step there was death. His fortune, his life, his all, hung upon a thread!

It was lonely—very lonely! As he walked onwards, the pitying snow began to fall flake after flake, threatening to cover the ground with the same pall of



white which it had worn during so many weeks of the last four months. The prize, which the German armies had waited for during those long weary months, was now fairly within their grasp. Paris could do no more. The failure of the last sortie, and the rapid exhaustion of the remaining supplies of bread, were convincing even the most sanguine of the hopelessness of the task. De Lafarges tried to be a stoic, and to remind himself that these things had happened again and again in the history of nations, and that failure had not always been the fault of the nations so visited. It is the highest powers—the dynasties—he thought, which do the mischief; and the inoffensive suffer—the inoffensive who are at last awakened from their trance, and learn—even the simplest of them—to show subversive opinions. But somehow De Lafarges had ceased to be a stoic. A man, rolling a wheel-barrow with a cloak thrown charitably over its contents, made

him sigh as he pushed his way past him, and a little child dressed in rags, and crying for bread—its mother was one of the “missing,” and had probably been killed by a bombshell—disturbed the current of his philosophy. He took the child up in his arms, and comforted it and, after feeding it with the food which was his allowance for the day, carried it to some Sisters of Charity who were taking immediate care of such little ones, and returned sick at heart and faint to his own lodgings. That night he lay down to rest, expecting as usual to take his place in the morning at one of the forts which were occupied with famine-stricken garrisons, whose sufferings had long ago deprived them of enthusiasm. It was during the dismal hours at those outposts, when his face had been turned to the enemy, with his sword beside him and his pipe between his lips, that the real meaning of his past life, with all its errors and its failures, had first of all

been shown to him, and he had learnt to bear his personal grief as France was bearing her punishment. He did not know how long he could endure the ordeal now, even varied by sensational incident. The cold and exposure were telling on him, and he thought he should die before the siege had ended.

But on the following morning there were rumours of change, and a short time afterwards the news was flying through Paris, and reaching the terrified inhabitants, who had transported their bedding into cellars.

"The fire has ceased—we have an armistice."

There was one infallible sign—a precursor of the peace. Speculating shopkeepers were bringing out their dried provisions, and selling off their last rabbits for the highest prices they could get for them.

To most of the inhabitants of the beleaguered city, the first feeling was one

of relief. The most devoted patriotism could do no more. Love and despair, hope and agony had all been so long blended together "with their companions of cold and privation," that the bravest hearts could hold out no longer.

"Now at last," was the cry, "at last we shall have news." Whole carts full of letters were already coming into Paris. These could not be received at once, there were the preliminaries and formalities. And then De Lafarges had a letter from Maitland. He opened it with trembling hands. He was not like the majority of other men, hoping but for one word of consolation from their wives or their sweethearts, which might comfort them in the midst of most hideous surroundings. He thought he had nothing to hope for, and uttered his first astonished cry when he read that Rosette was well, restored to health of mind as well as that of body. She had a child, not the little

girl for whom he had lately been wishing, but a boy, on whom Maitland lavished her praises.

"Ah, boys are worth more than girls in times like this," thought the satisfied father, when he had recovered his self-possession, as he continued the letter, and learnt how his wife was constantly asking for him.

"Come back to us as soon as you can," wrote the peacemaker. "There is nothing to divide you—now."

His sister-in-law went on to deplore the disasters of Paris, the uselessness of the exertions of the Parisians, and the misery of their present condition.

"No, no," wrote De Lafarges in his answer to her, "Paris has been superb. There are losses it is true, but between that and utter ruin there is a great margin. I too have had a Sedan. And my Sedan has been a turning point in my existence."

"Now that he admits himself to be

conquered, he may look forward to better victories," thought Maitland in her hopefulness as she read the letter.

"You may yet have a happy life before you," she said to Rosette, as she read her some of the saddest portions of this last letter, "all the happier for its first disasters. You do not value your husband as he deserves to be valued, in spite of his past errors. You have no idea of the reality of things. You have not understood that during long months of absolute captivity, in which famine, cold, cannon and disease have menaced him on all sides, he has seemed to have no thought but for you—he has waited for you as a prisoner waits for the first rays of sunshine which penetrate his dungeon."

## EPILOGUE.

SIX months had passed away again, and once more Maitland was almost alone. It was like a miracle, now that she looked back upon it, to remember that Rosette had returned with her husband and baby to France, and that the young wife's dread of De Lafarges seemed to have altogether disappeared.

But Rosette was altered as well as her husband, and now that her brief delirium was over, half her former fancies seemed to have deserted her. And there was

not much to dread in the sober and saddened man who also had suffered till the storm had seemed to thrill through the very fibres of his being, and who had given up the means of livelihood which had led to so much evil, intending to support his wife and child by honest effort.

Maitland had been the first to persuade her sister to show some sympathy for Lafarges, and to lead her by slow degrees to acknowledge that her husband's story was a sad one, and that many of his errors were to be ascribed to his bringing up. But the task had been a difficult one, so difficult that at times it seemed to be well nigh impossible. For in the beginning, when Rosette recovered from her illness, she had, as the village gossips remarked, "about as much to say for herself as if she had been a speechless ghost," and was "altogether more like a shadder than real flesh and blood." And then as she grew better and was able to join in conversation, everything con-



nected with her life in Normandy had been avoided by her as if the subject were poison. But Maitland was determined to compel her to approach it, for her sensitive and honourable nature had decided the truth from the commencement of her sister's recovery. The cup which Rosette had chosen for herself *could* not be dashed to the ground because she was tired of it.

"It is his father's country—it is right you should make up your mind to go back to it, even though he writes as if nothing could heal the wounds of that unhappy country," Maitland had forced herself to answer when Rosette had first of all asked her angrily,

"By what authority am I compelled to return to him? Have I not borne enough?"

The answer was given to her in a still small voice.

"By God's authority."

And though the invalid was first of

all restless, defiant, and nervous—the struggle lasting in her mind for days and nights, during which she was sometimes inclined to refer to her sister for a decision, and then again to implore her to revoke her verdict—yet Maitland's arguments conquered at last.

“Yes, I have made up my mind. I will go back to him,” she said one day, after she had been listening to explanatory passages from one of Paul's carefully worded letters. “It was what I chose for myself. I ought to go on with it.” And then she added with a quick dry sob, “Maitland, write to my husband, and tell him I hope he will come back to me and to his boy, as soon as he is able. I am sorry for him.”

It was not a very hopeful commencement, but it was a right one; and Maitland said softly to herself as she wrote the letter, “I do not fear for her; I will not fear.”

Rosette had grown very near to her

sister's heart during those days and weeks of convalescence. But Maitland ignored her own self-abnegation in thus parting with her and the little child, for this self-abnegation had become so usual to her that it was a part of her very being. For the first time she realised all the pangs of anxiety she had at one time suffered concerning her sister, and thought that if she could only see Rosette harboured in some safe creek, to spend the rest of her life in sober and chastened contentment, she could endure her own loneliness to the end. Love—the love of God and man—was, after all, the only perfect good. She had asked for that only, and no man had had power to take it away from her. Even her father was restored to her. He did not succumb to his illness, but somehow struggled through it, and rose from his bed after a time with whitened hair, bent body, and shrivelled skin, never to resume his former occupations, but to linger, for a short time, through a

new, harmless, contented form of old age.

The first meeting between De Lafarges and his wife had taken place when Mr. Gathorne was still dangerously ill, and it afterwards seemed as if the undefinable sacredness of the sick-room, with its look of solemn change, had had the wholesome effect of softening past recollections, and restoring difficulties which had appeared inordinate, to their natural proportions.

"Child-life of any kind," as Maitland sometimes reminded herself, "is unable to tell its sensations, and does not reason about its own growth." And neither her father nor Paul de Lafarges talked much of their change of opinions, still less of the thoughts which sometimes stung them, waking recollections of past sorrow or past struggle with temptation, weakness and pain. The calm and the healing time had come to them, they could scarcely explain how.

To James Moorcroft, who met Maitland sometimes during these happier times, it seemed as if her face shone with the nimbus of a saint. There was a rapturous expression in it, like that of a spiritual Madonna, when with a warmth of emotion pulsing to her cheeks, she would tell him that her father was able to sit up, or add—laughing with wet eyes—that De Lafarges had actually gone for a walk in the village carrying his baby on his shoulder.

A woman likely to be lonely as long as she lived in this world, and never to be a joyful mother of children, except in the spiritual sense, she thought herself, without ever repining at the thought. The family life of others seemed to be sufficient to interest her; there were so many to be helped, that she had little time to think of self. And though with her tender clinging to mysterious promises, she looked forward in a literal way to a future existence where the wildernesses

which had been desolate on earth should blossom into loveliness—yet for the present, her gentle ministrations and her unselfish love contented her; the love which she had for all her kind, and which was simple, constant and pure, such as God intended man to have for his fellow-man.

She showed this simple affectionateness of her nature to her old friend James Moorcroft, just as readily as she showed it to other people, being never tired of thanking him for helping to save her father's life, and never weary of asking his advice about the invalid. But was it possible that she could ever feel for him a sentiment stronger than friendship? Moorcroft asked himself the question with overwhelming anxiety, reminding himself of the difficulties which they two had confronted together, and of the hopes and the fears which they shared in common.

He had sufficient to keep Maitland and

her father at last, for the living of Llandyffryn had been unexpectedly given to him on the resignation of the Vicar, at the beginning of the year.

None of them could complain of poverty any longer, for Harry was returning from India with sufficient provision for his father, and it was arranged that Steenie—whose health had latterly much improved—should go to board in London, with money supplied by Captain Eylmer, who had determined to help him to study for his favourite pursuit.

Maitland was likely to be free, freer than she had been for years, and yet Mr. Moorcroft hesitated lest he should startle her by his announcement. He was released by circumstances from his promise to Mr. Gathorne.

“Yet the difference of age,” he argued, “may still make me uninteresting to her. She has always thought of me rather as an older friend or a relation.”

Only, one day, when he had heard by accident that a plan had been arranged for Maitland to live in London with Stephen and old Mark Eylmer, in the event of her father's death, he could bear it no longer, but was startled into hasty speech.

"If you have still a heart to give," he said, in eager accents, "will you remember how long I have loved you?"

Maitland was too surprised to answer, and he continued,

"A foolish passion has not made me blind. You may remember my age, and think I am presuming on you. But do not decide too hastily, for mine is a serious love, founded on long reflection, and after my comparison of you with all the other women I have ever come in contact with."

He talked on, and she listened without interrupting him. He referred to their difference of age, and she



had half a mind to interrupt him then.

But a year or two ago, she had been as young as he seemed to think her, but now she felt as if she were on the inclined plane—age seemed to have rushed on her rapidly.

Yet she suddenly remembered that her actual age was barely five and twenty. And as she listened to this man who was still determined to woo her, it seemed as if she had something within her, very old, and yet young—two souls—one which had lived centuries in but a few years, and the other which had never been suffered to come naturally into being. Her old soul, which had been scarred by misfortune, and was, as she thought with a half-smile, battered about like an anvil that had been repeatedly bruised by the blows of a hammer—seemed to be shocked by the sudden revelation of this younger soul, which still had its yearnings, and its ungratified desires. “It is too late,”

it said, "why do you think of waking? You had better slumber again."

For the slumber had not been at all an unpleasant one—it had rather been a pleasant sensation of rest, wrapping her like a form of soothing sleep.

The voice of James Moorcroft struck again upon her ear, and the tone of disappointment in it was inexpressibly painful to her.

"I am expecting too much," he said slowly; "I have three children, and they may be burdensome to a woman who is not their mother."

Then the recollection came back to her that the time for rest was not yet—the joys as well as the burdens of the day might still be hers.

"That is true," she answered, with her face still averted, as if she were dispassionately considering the question, "but your children are very manageable—a woman may be proud of them."

"Perhaps—if a woman naturally likes children."

"Do you believe a woman exists who does not like children?"

"Not many women—but a few—it is that which makes me anxious. You were engaged once before to a man near your own age—not hampered by responsibilities—and you may naturally fear them and hate the thought of marrying a matter-of-fact fellow in the prosy afternoon of life, who is burdened with them."

"Why will you say such things," she answered, falteringly; "is it to make me remember my mistake?"

"You hide your face not to displease me, or show me your repugnance. Child, I do not blame you—I will not urge you again. I should not really love you if I did not desire your true happiness."

"My happiness!" she half whispered, with a hot blush, and speaking more to herself than to him. "Why harp on that old story?—I—I don't think I ever cared

for Randal Stanton—I believe I was silly. And yet if he were to think of coming back to Caerwyn, as I believe he is thinking of coming, I would do my best to help him to retrieve his past mistakes, I have promised to be his friend.”

She was trembling and leaning forward to hide her emotion, but as he was nervous too he did not notice that there was anything remarkable in her confusion. Suddenly she turned, and he saw the tears upon her cheek, with the look of reproach which cut him to the quick.

She gave him her hand without saying another word.

“I understand ;” he said ; “you would help everyone if you could, even your worst enemy, and in the nature of things you are sorry for me. You are so good—you are sorry to make me unhappy—but—I see—you cannot care for me.”

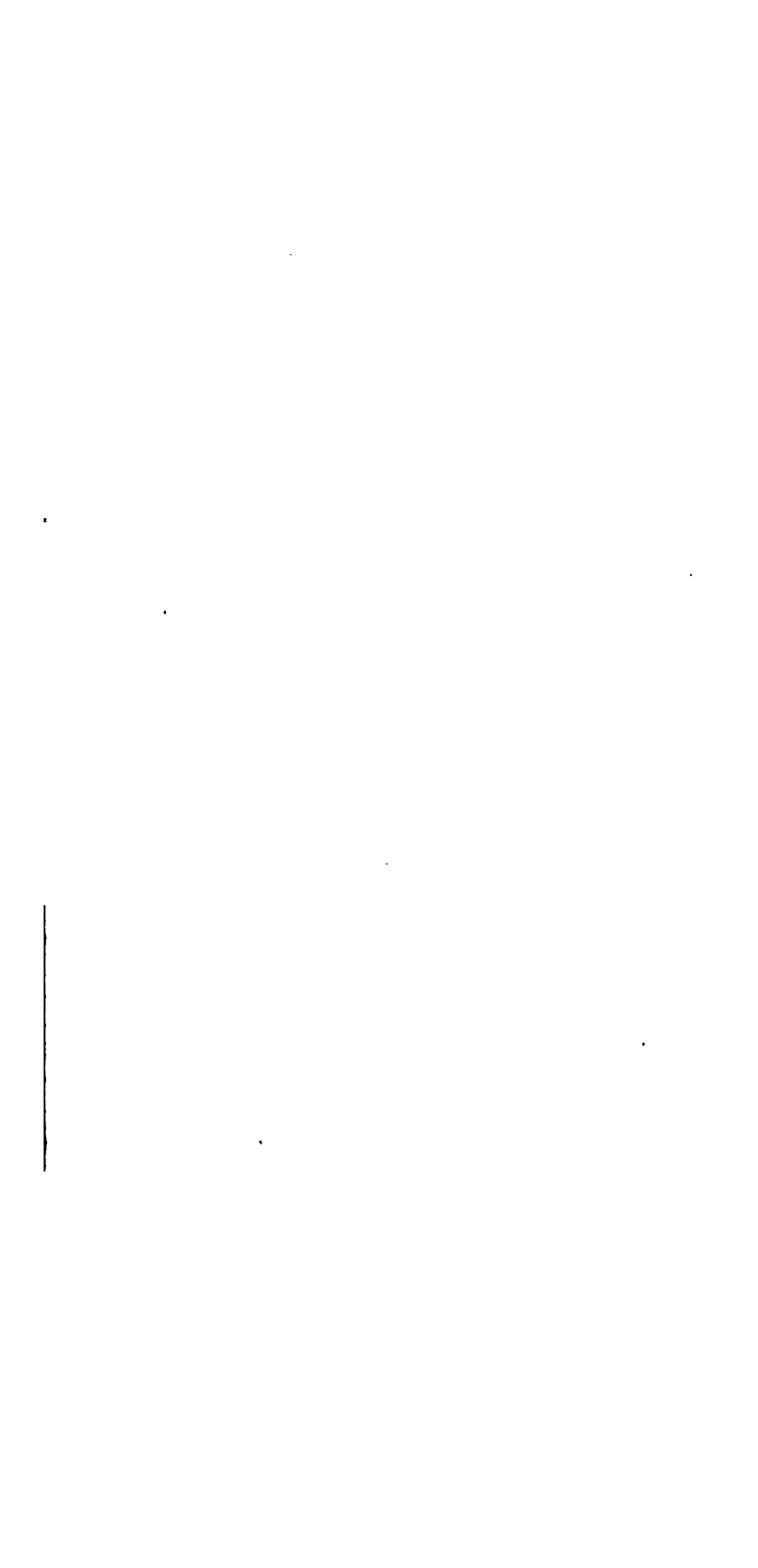
Then the young soul conquered, which God had not made sad.

“Ah,” she said, still reproachfully, as she kept her hand in his, “cannot you guess that I have learnt to love you?”

THE END.

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